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THE

GOSPEL OF ST. LUKE

BY

ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D.D.

THIRD EDITION

London
HODDER AND STOUGHTON
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PREFACE.

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LESSON I.

The Announcement of the New Elijah.

ST. LUKE i. 5-17.

5. "There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judæa, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth.

6. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.

7. And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were now well stricken in years.

8. And it came to pass that while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course,

9. According to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord.

10. And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense.

11. And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense.

12. And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.

13. But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John.

14. And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth.

15. For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb.

16. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God.

17. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just: to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

HOW significant is the mention of "Herod, king of Judea"! It is more than a date. So low had the nation fallen that an Idumean stranger sat in David's seat.

The darkest hour is that before the dawn; and the presence of the usurper was to waiting souls the sign that the coming of the true King was not far off.

The peaceful, pious home of the old priest is beautifully outlined. It was somewhere in the hill country; perhaps, as has been suggested, at Juttah, perhaps in some unnamed town of Judah. There, in quiet seclusion, the priestly pair had lived in cheerful godliness, their happy uniformity of life broken only by Zacharias's journeys to Jerusalem, twice a year, for his week of office, and their content marred only by the absence of child-voices in their quiet house. They presented a lovely example of Old Testament piety in a time of declension. Inwardly, they were "righteous before God"; outwardly, their lives were blamelessly conformed to His "commandments and ordinances." That phrase does not seem to mean "ceremonial and moral" precepts, but is the translation of two Hebrew words often used in conjunction,—*Mizvoth* and *Mishpatim*,—to describe, not different parts, but different aspects, of the undivided law. We are not to read into this description any dogmatic assertion of absolute, sinless perfection, but simply to take it as a picture of Old Testament religion, such as was Paul's (Phil. iii. 6). Earth shows no fairer sight than a home where husband and wife dwell as heirs together of the grace of life and fellow-helpers to the truth. Such a home was the fit environment for the youth of that mighty spirit through which, after four hundred years of silence, the Word of God again spoke. In its secluded purity and atmosphere of holy obedience John waxed strong in spirit, and learned that lofty conception of holiness and that abhorrence of sin which gave fire to his rebukes and beseechingness to his call to repentance. The salt of a nation is in its pious home life.

The scene changes from the quiet hill-town and the still

seclusion of the childless home to the thronged courts of the temple. Zacharias had to go twice a year, with the other members of his "course," for their turn of duty. He drew the lot, which gave him the coveted honour of entering the holy place with his censer. So rarely did this fall to a priest that probably he had never done it before. It was the culminating moment of his official life; and, naturally, a man so devout would be deeply moved as he passed into the sanctuary and stood there before the altar, with the table of shew-bread on one side and the great candlestick on the other, and offered up, as the representative of the whole nation, the symbolic incense which spoke, as it wreathed upwards, of the aspirations and prayers attending the sacrifice. As he stands, visible to the crowd in the outer court, and supported, in the solemn solitude of the sanctuary, by the sound of their many voices in prayer, we can easily suppose that he was exalted to a specially receptive openness of mind for communication with heaven. And, no doubt, he was one of those who waited for the Messiah, and fed his patient hope on the words of the prophets.

We can scarcely suppose that at such a moment his prayer was only for the blessing of children in his home; and yet the angel's words which connect the promise of a son with the answer to his prayer require that that desire should have blended with the wider longings natural at such a time. At all events, he sees what the people in the court do not see,—though they could see him,—the suddenly appearing angel, whose very position is an omen for good; for he stands by the altar, as if witnessing the acceptance of the incense of prayer; and at its right, which was the auspicious side. Of course, this appearance of the angel is a stumbling-block nowadays to the people who know so much that they can pronounce on what is possible and impossible; but, unless we are overmastered by prejudice, we shall not put

aside a historical document simply because it recounts a supernatural appearance of a superhuman being. After all, the grounds for disbelief in the existence of angels are little more than "I never saw one,"—which does not become any stronger by being wrapped up in philosophical language. It was as fitting that many attendant angels should hover near the cradle of their King as that they should fall into the background after the communication between earth and heaven was opened for ever through him. Agitation and fear shake even a good man's soul,—and that even while in the act of worship, when the thick veil between us and the Unseen rends at one point. Why should supernatural appearances produce dread? Not only because they are strange, but in some measure, also, because of the consciousness of impurity, which the purest feel most.

The angel's message begins, as Heaven's messages to devout souls ever do, with the soothing words,—the very signature of Divine appearances, both in the Old and New Testaments,—"Fear not." It is like a mother's whisper to a terrified child, and is made still more caressing and assuring by the use of the name "Zacharias," and by the assurance that his prayer is heard. Note how the names of the whole future family are in this verse, as token of the intimate and loving knowledge which God has of each. The name to be given to the child of promise is a happy omen,—"Jehovah is gracious." The parents' hearts are to be filled with joy, and many are to share in it. Mercifully does Heaven veil the future; and no presage of the dark clouds of sorrow or of the bloody tomb which awaited the child darken the bright promise of his birth.

Verse 15 describes in broad outline the character, and verses 16 and 17 the office, of John. He is to be "great in the sight of the Lord." How true that prediction was, Christ's eulogium witnesses, which declared that no greater

had been born of woman. Greatness, prophesied by an angel and attested by Jesus, is greatness indeed. Greatness "in the sight of the Lord" is measured by very different standards from the world's. It does not lie in the qualities that make the hero or the thinker, the artist or the poet, but such as make the prophet and the saint. There will be a wonderful reversal of judgments one day. The true ambition is to be great after this pattern; great in dauntless witness for God, in self-suppression, in yearning toward the Christ, in pointing to Him, and in lowly contentment to fade in His light, and decrease that He may increase. The ascetic simplicity of his life is made prominent. He was a Nazarite, devoted to God by solemn vow, and with lips unsullied by wine or strong drink. Instead of their deceitful inspiration, he was filled with the Holy Spirit, the source of all true courage, buoyancy, and strength. These, then, are the equipments of this great athlete, who girded up his loins to run before the king's chariot,—true greatness of soul, noble suppression of the animal nature, and scorn of mere soft and silken ways and delight, and a large bestowment of Divine influence from his childhood onward. If we have the second, we shall not seek the third in vain; and if we have these two, we shall have the first, whatever the world may think of us.

The work He had to do could not be done by any man less richly gifted. It was a giant's task. It is described in words largely coloured by the closing words of the Old Testament. Malachi ends his prophecy, as it were, standing on tiptoe of expectation, and directing a pointing finger onward to a coming of Jehovah, to be preceded by the mission of "Elijah the prophet." In like manner the New Testament ends with a gaze onward to the second coming of the Lord, and bids us stand in the same attitude of expectation. The angel's promise by its direct quotation of

Malachi announces that the hour so long waited for has struck, and thrills the old priest's heart with the thought that his child is to be the Elijah of whom he had so often read, and for whose coming he and all faithful souls had so long prayed.

Certainly never was historical parallel more singularly exact than in the likeness between the fiery Tishbite, who leaps into the history without warning, a full-armed warrior for God, and John. The same concentrated energy and sternness; the same work,—to arrest the decay of faith and restore nobler life; the same undaunted courage, so that of each might be said what was said of one not unlike them in his strong character, "Here lies one who never feared the face of man"; the same relations to rulers, so that Elijah, Ahab, and Jezebel have doubles in John, Herod the younger, and Herodias; the same asceticism; the same solitary life,—these are the salient features of likeness. But John had the higher office, in that he was to "go before His face." We can scarcely infer from the use of "His" here that the Divine nature of the Messiah is implied. The word does not necessarily carry more than the thought that in some way the Lord came when Messiah came. It does involve that; and that was all that Zacharias was able to receive. Elijah ran before Ahab's chariot from Carmel to Jezreel. John is the herald of a mightier King; and we know that in Him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead, and that He is God manifest in the flesh; nay, we may go farther, and say that the Jehovah of the Old Testament is the Eternal Son, who in all ages has been the medium of Divine manifestation.

John's function is described further in language borrowed in part from Malachi, but modified from the original. "To turn the hearts of the fathers to the children" is scarcely sufficiently explained by the interpretation which makes it

equivalent to "restoring domestic concord," which was not, in fact, any characteristic of the tendency of John's mission. The other explanation, which makes it mean "to bring back to the existing generation the nobler dispositions of the golden age of the nation, and to make the degenerate descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob inheritors of their faith and power with God," is wider and worthier, corresponds with John's actual work, and fits in with the second clause, "The disobedient to walk in the wisdom of the just," which is in inverted parallelism with the preceding, and gives the "disobedient" as corresponding to "the children," and "the just" to "the fathers." The whole describes his work as that of restoring the declining religious condition of the people, and so making them truly "a people prepared for the Lord." This view of his office corresponds to the impression of his preaching given in the synoptic Gospels, according to which his task was rather to prepare the people for the Christ than to point Him out; but it does not exclude the other side of his work, exercised on select and susceptible spirits, or only transcended to others under special circumstances, which we mainly find in John's Gospel, when he made known Jesus as Messiah.

The angel's prophecy tells the Divine design of John's mission, not the historical results of it. How far short these fell of that is the tragedy of Israel's history, and the most solemn instance of man's awful power to counterwork God's merciful designs, and to turn blessings into curses, and His messengers of mercy into witnesses against those who reject them.

LESSON II.

The First New Testament Psalm

St. Luke i. 46-55.

46. "And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord,
47. And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.
48. For He hath regarded the low estate of His handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.
49. For He that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is His name.
50. And His mercy is on them that fear Him from generation to generation.
51. He hath shewed strength with His arm; He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.
52. He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and exalted them of low degree.
53. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich He hath sent empty away.
54. He hath holpen His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy;
55. As He spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever."

BIRDS sing at dawn and sunrise. It was fitting that the last strains of Old Testament psalmody should prelude the birth of Jesus. To disbelievers in the Incarnation the hymns of Mary and Zacharias are, of course, forgeries; but if it be true nothing can be more "natural" than these. The very features in this song, which are appealed to as proof of its being the work of some unknown pious liar or dishonest enthusiast, really confirm its genuineness. Critics shake their heads over its many quotations and allusions to Hannah's song and to other poetical parts of the Old Testament, and declare that these are fatal to its being accepted as Mary's. Why? Must the simple village

maiden be a poetess because she is the mother of our Lord? What is more likely than that she should cast her emotions into the forms so familiar to her, and especially that Hannah's hymn should colour hers? These old psalms provided the mould into which the glowing emotions almost instinctively would run, and the very absence of "originality" in the song favours its genuineness.

Another point may be noticed as having a similar bearing; namely, the very general and almost vague outline of the consequences of the birth, which is regarded as being the consummation to Israel of the mercy promised to the fathers. Could such a hymn have been written when sad experience showed how the nation would reject their Messiah, and ruin themselves thereby? Surely the anticipations which glow in it bear witness to the time when they were cherished, as prior to the sad tragedy which history unfolded. Little does Mary as yet know that "a sword shall pierce through" her "own soul also," and that not only will "all generations" call her "blessed," but that one of her names will be "Our Lady of Sorrows." For her and for us, the future is mercifully veiled. Only one eye saw the shadow of the Cross stretching black and grim athwart the earliest days of Jesus, and that eye was His own. How wonderful the calmness with which He pressed towards that "mark" during all His earthly life!

The hymn is sometimes divided into four strophes or sections: First, the expression of devout emotion (vers. 46-48*a*); second, the great fact from which they arise (vers. 48*b*-50); third, the consequences of the fact (vers. 51-53); fourth, its aspect to Israel as fulfilment of promise. This division is, no doubt, in accordance with the course of thought, but is perhaps somewhat too artificial for our purposes; and we may rather simply note that in the earlier part the personal element is present, and that in the later it

fades entirely, and the mighty deeds of God alone fill the meek singer's eye and lips. We may consider the lessons of these two halves.

1. The more personal part extends to the end of verse 50. It contains three turnings or strophes, the first two of which have two clauses each, and the third three. The first is verses 46 and 47, the purely personal expression of the glad emotions awakened by Elisabeth's presence and salutation, which came to Mary as confirmation of the angel's annunciation. Not when Gabriel spoke, but when a woman like herself called her "mother of my Lord," did she break into praise. There is a deep truth there. God's voice is made more sure to our weakness when it is echoed by human lips, and our inmost hopes attain substance when they are shared and spoken by another. We need not attribute to the maiden from Nazareth philosophical accuracy when she speaks of her "soul" and "spirit." Her first words are a burst of rapturous and wondering praise, in which the full heart runs over. Silence is impossible, and speech a relief. They are not to be construed with the microscopic accuracy fit to be applied to a treatise on psychology. "All that is within" her praises and is glad. She does not think so much of the stupendous fact as of her own meekly exultant heart, and of God, to whom its outgoings turn. There are moods in which the devout soul dwells on its own calm blessedness and on God, its source, more directly than on the gift which brings it. Note the twofold act,—magnifying and rejoicing. We magnify God when we take into our vision some fragment more of the complete circle of His essential greatness, or when, by our means, our fellows are helped to do so. The intended effect of all His dealings is that we should think more nobly—that is, more worthily—of Him. The fuller knowledge of His friendly greatness leads to joy in Him which makes the spirit bound as in a

dance,—for such is the meaning of the word "rejoice,"—and which yet is calm and deep. Note the double name of God,—Lord and Saviour. Mary bows in lowly obedience, and looks up in as lowly, conscious need of deliverance, and, beholding in God both His majesty and His grace, magnifies and exults at once.

Verse 48 is the second turn of thought, containing, like the former, two clauses. In it she gazes on her great gift, which, with maiden reserve, she does not throughout the whole hymn once directly name. Here the personal element comes out more strongly. But it is beautiful to note that the "lowliness" is in the foreground, and precedes the assurance of the benedictions of all generations. The whole is like a murmur of wonder that such honour should come to her, so insignificant, and the "behold" of the latter half verse is an exclamation of surprise. In unshaken meekness of stedfast obedience, she feels herself "the handmaid of the Lord." In undisturbed humility, she thinks of her "low estate," and wonders that God's eye should have fallen on her, the village damsel, poor and hidden. A pure heart is humbled by honour, and is not so dazzled by the vision of future fame as to lose sight of God as the source of all. Think of that simple young girl in her obscurity having flashed before her the certainty that her name would be repeated with blessing till the world's end, and then thus meekly laying her honours down at God's feet. What a lesson of how to receive all distinctions and exaltations!

Verses 49 and 50 end this part, and contain three clauses, in which the personal disappears, and only the thought of God's character as manifested in His wonderful act remains. It connects indeed with the preceding by the "to me" of verse 49; but the main subject is the new revelation, which is not confined to Mary, of the threefold Divine glory fused

into one bright beam, in the Incarnation. Power, holiness, eternal mercy, are all there, and that in deeper and more wondrous fashion than Mary knew when she sang. The words are mostly quotations from the Old Testament, but with new application and meaning. But even Mary's anticipations fell far short of the reality of that power in weakness, that holiness, mildly blended with tenderest pity and pardoning love; that mercy which for all generations was to stretch not only to "them that fear Him," but to rebels, whom it would make friends. She saw but dimly and in part. We see more plainly all the rays of Divine perfection meeting in, and streaming out to the whole world, from her Son, "the effulgence of the Father's glory."

2. The second part of the song is a lyric anticipation of the historical consequences of the appearance of the Messiah, cast into forms ready to the singer's hand, in the strains of Old Testament prophecy. The characteristics of Hebrew poetry, its parallelism, its antitheses, its exultant swing, are more conspicuous here than in the earlier half. The main thought of verses 51 to 53 is that the Messiah would bring about a revolution, in which the high would be cast down and the humble exalted. This idea is wrought out in a threefold antithesis, of which the first pair must have one member supplied from the previous verse. Those who "fear Him" are opposed to "the proud in the imagination of their hearts." These are thought of as an army of antagonists to God and His anointed, and thus the word "scattered" acquires great poetic force, and reminds us of many a psalm, such as the second and one hundred and tenth, where Messiah is a warrior.

The next pair represents the antithesis as being that of social degree, and in it there may be traced a glance at "Herod the King" and the depressed line of David, to which the singer belonged, while the meaning must not

be confined to that. The third pair represent the same opposites under the guise of poverty and riches. Mary is not to be credited with purely spiritual views in these contrasts, nor to be discredited with purely material ones. She, no doubt, thought of her own oppressed nation as mainly meant by the hungry and lowly; but, like all pious souls in Israel, she must have felt that lowliness and hunger, which Messiah was to ennoble and satisfy, meant a condition of spirit, conscious of weakness and sin, and eagerly desiring a higher good and food than earth could give. So much she had learned from many a psalm and prophet. So much the Spirit which inspired psalmist and prophet spoke in her lowly and exultant heart now. But the future was only revealed to her in this wide, general outline. Details of manner and time were all still blank. The broad truth which she foretold remains one of the salient historical results of Christ's coming, and is the universal condition of partaking of His gifts. He has been, and is, the most revolutionary force in history; for without Him society is constituted on principles the reverse of the true, and, as the world, apart from Jesus, is down-side up, the mission of His gospel is to turn it upside-down, and so bring the right side uppermost. The condition of receiving anything from Him is the humble recognition of emptiness and need. If princes on their thrones will come to Him just in the same way as the beggar on the dunghill does, they will very probably be allowed to stay on them; and if the rich man will come to Him as poor and in need of all things, he will not be "sent empty away." But Christ is a discriminating Christ, and, as the prophet said long before Mary, "I . . . will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick; and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with judgment."

The last turn in the song celebrates the faithfulness of

God to His ancient promises, and His help by His Messiah to Israel. The designation of Israel as "His servant" recalls the familiar name in Isaiah's later prophecies. Mary sees in the great wonder of her Son's birth the accomplishment of the hopes of ages, and an assurance of God's mercy as for ever the portion of the people. We cannot tell how far she had learned that Israel was to be counted, not by descent, but disposition. But, in any case, her eyes could not have embraced the solemn facts of her Son's rejection by His and her people. No shadows are yet cast across the morning of which her song is the herald. She knew not the dark clouds of thunder and destruction that were to sweep over the sky. But the end has not yet come, and we have to believe still that the evening shall fulfil the promise of the morning, and "all Israel shall be saved," and that the mercy which was promised from of old to Abraham and the fathers, be fulfilled at last and abide with their seed for ever.

LESSON III.

The Morning Hymn of the Gospel.

St. Luke i. 67-80.

67. "And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying,

68. Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for He hath visited and redeemed His people,

69. And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David;

70. As He spake by the mouth of His holy prophets, which have been since the world began:

71. That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us;

72. To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant;

73. The oath which He sware to our father Abraham,

74. That He would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve Him without fear,

75. In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.

76. And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways;

77. To give knowledge of salvation unto His people by the remission of their sins,

78. Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the day-spring from on high hath visited us,

79. To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

80. And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel."

ZACHARIAS was dumb when he disbelieved. His lips were opened when he believed. He is the last of the Old Testament prophets,* and, as standing nearest

* In the strictest sense, John the Baptist was a prophet of the Old dispensation, even though he came to usher-in the New. (See Matt.

to the Messiah, his song takes up the echoes of all the past, and melts them into a new outpouring of exultant hope. The strain is more impassioned than Mary's, and throbs with triumph over "our enemies," but rises above the mere patriotic glow into a more spiritual region. The complete subordination of the personal element is very remarkable, as shown by the slight and almost parenthetical reference to John. The father is forgotten in the devout Israelite. We may take the song as divided into three portions: the first (vers. 68-75) celebrating the coming of Messiah, with special reference to its effect in freeing Israel from its foes; the second (vers. 76, 77), the highly dramatic address to his unconscious "child"; the third (vers. 78, 79) returns to the absorbing thought of the Messiah, but now touches on higher aspects of His coming as the light to all who sit in darkness.

I. If we remember that four hundred dreary years, for the most part of which Israel had been groaning under a foreign yoke, had passed since the last of the prophets, and that during all that time devout eyes had looked wearily for the promised Messiah, we shall be able to form some faint conception of the surprise and rapture which filled Zacharias's spirit, and leaps in his hymn at the thought that now, at last, the hour had struck, and that the child would soon be born who was to fulfil the Divine promises and satisfy fainting hopes. No wonder that its first words are a burst of blessing of "the God of Israel." The best expression of joy, when long-cherished desires are at last on the eve of accomplishment, is thanks to God. How short the time of waiting seems when it is past, and how needless the impatience which marred the waiting!

xi. 9-11.) In the same sense, Zacharias was the last prophet of the Old dispensation, before the coming of his son to link the Old with the New.

Zacharias speaks of the fact as already realized. He must have known that the incarnation was accomplished; for we can scarcely suppose that the emphatic tenses "hath visited, hath redeemed, hath raised" are prophetic, and merely imply the certainty of a future event. He must have known, too, Mary's royal descent; for he speaks of "the house of David."

"A horn" of salvation is an emblem taken from animals, and implies strength. Here it recalls several prophecies, and, as a designation of the Messiah, shadows forth His conquering might, all to be used for deliverance to His people. The vision before Zacharias is that of a victor king of Davidic race, long foretold by prophets, who will set Israel free from its foreign oppressors, whether Roman or Idumean, and in whom God Himself "visits and redeems His people." There are two kinds of Divine visitations,—one for mercy and one for judgment. What an unconscious witness it is of men's evil consciences that the use of the phrase has almost exclusively settled down upon the latter meaning! In verses 71-75, the idea of the Messianic salvation is expanded and raised. The word "salvation" is best construed, as in the Revised Version, as in apposition with and explanatory of "horn of salvation." This salvation has issues, which may also be regarded as God's purposes in sending it. These are threefold: first, to show mercy to the dead fathers of the race. That is a striking idea, and pictures the departed as, in their solemn rest, sharing in the joy of Messiah's coming, and perhaps in the blessings which He brings. We may not too closely press the phrase, but it is more than poetry or imagination. The next issue is God's remembrance of His promise, or, in other words, His fulfilment of these. The last is that the nation, being set free, should serve God. The external deliverance was in the eyes of devout men like Zacharias

as precious as a means to an end. Political freedom was needful for God's service, and was valuable mainly as leading to that. The hymn rises far above the mere impatience of a foreign yoke. "Freedom to worship God," and God worshipped by a ransomed nation, is Zacharias's ideal of the Messianic times.

Note his use of the word for priestly "service." He, a priest, has not forgotten that by original constitution all Israel was a nation of priests; and he looks forward to the fulfilment at last of the ideal which so soon became impracticable, and possibly to the abrogation of his own order in the universal priesthood. He knew not what deep truths he sang. The end of Christ's coming, and of the deliverance which He works for us from the hand of our enemies, cannot be better stated than in these words. We are redeemed that we may be priests unto God. Our priestly service must be rendered in "holiness and righteousness," in consecration to God and discharge of all obligations; and it is to be no interrupted or occasional service, like Zacharias's, which occupied but two short weeks in the year, and might never again lead him within the sanctuary, but is to fill with reverent activity and thankful sacrifice all our days. However this hymn may have begun with the mere external conception of Messianic deliverance, it rises high above that here, and will still further soar beyond it. We may learn from this priest-prophet, who anticipated the wise men and brought his offerings to the unborn Christ, what Christian salvation is, and for what it is given us.

II. There is something very vivid and striking in the abrupt address to the infant, who lay, all unknowing, in his mother's arms. The contrast between him as he was then and the work which waited him, the paternal wonder and joy which yet can scarcely pause on the child, and hurries

on to fancy him in the years to come, going herald-like before the face of the Lord, the profound prophetic insight into John's work, are all noteworthy. The Baptist did "prepare the way" by teaching that the true "salvation" was not to be found in mere deliverance from the Roman yoke, but "in remission of sin." He thus not only gave "knowledge of salvation," in the sense that he announced the fact that it would be given, but also in the sense that he clearly taught in what it consisted. John was no preacher of revolt, as the turbulent and impure patriots of the day would have liked him to be, but of repentance. His work was to awake the consciousness of sin, and so to kindle desires for a salvation which was deliverance from sin, the only yoke which really enslaves. Zacharias the "blameless" saw what the true bondage of the nation was, and what the work both of the Deliverer and of his herald must be. We need to be perpetually reminded of the truth that the only salvation and deliverance which can do us any good consists in getting rid, by pardon and by holiness, of the cords of our sins.

III. The thoughts of the forerunner and his office melt into that of the Messianic blessings from which the singer cannot long turn away. In these closing words, we have the source, the essential nature, and the blessed results of the gift of Christ set forth in a noble figure, and freed from the national limitations of the earlier part of the hymn. All comes from the "bowels of mercy of our God," as Zacharias, in accordance with Old Testament metaphor, speaks, allocating the seat of the emotions which we attribute to the heart. Conventional notions of delicacy think the Hebrew idea coarse, but the one allocation is just as delicate as the other. We can get no deeper down or farther back into the secret springs of things than this,—that the root cause of all, and most especially of the mission of

Christ, is the pitying love of God's heart. If we hold fast by that, the pain of the riddle of the world is past, and the riddle itself more than half solved. Jesus Christ is the greatest gift of that love, in which all its tenderness and all its power are gathered up for our blessing.

The coming of Messiah is likened to the bursting of sunrise on a bewildered company, sitting huddled together in compulsory inaction in the dark, having lost their way, and afraid to move in the gloom. The blessed light shines, and they can see their road. There is music in that old word "dayspring," which one would be loath to lose. The simple meaning of the original is "rising"; and it is to be observed that the Septuagint uses the verb of the same form in Malachi iv. 2, concerning the "rising" of the "sun of righteousness,"—a passage the context of which colours both Mary's and Zacharias's songs. All images of returning activity after night, and of the cheerful dawn, are wrapped as in germ in the name; and all thoughts of light as the emblem of purity, joy and wisdom, are also hinted at. It would take many words to unfold all the sweetness compacted in the word: and it does take long experience and familiarity with more than one kind of darkness to know all the consolation and power which are brought to us when that sunshine floods our souls. How picturesque and tragically true is that phrase, "them that sit in darkness and the shadow of death"! Of course "darkness" is the emblem of ignorance, sin, and dreariness. It tells the doleful state of humanity apart from Christ; and how striking the representation that men "sit" in that darkness. Like some benighted travellers in an unknown land, afraid to stir for fear of pitfalls, precipices, and foes, men without Christ are forced to inaction, because they are in the dark. True, there may be plenty of energy as to material well-being,—but what torpor of spirit! The wide fields of

heathendom are the best expositions of the terrible truth of the word, where stagnation reigns supreme.

The modern civilised world owes most of its activity to the quickening influence of Christianity. The dayspring visits us that it may shine on us, and it shines that it may guide us into "the way of peace." There can be no wider and more accurate description of the end of Christ's mission than this,—that all His visitation and enlightenment are meant to lead us into the path where we shall find peace with God, and therefore with ourselves and with all mankind. The word "peace," in the Old Testament, is used to include the sum of all that men require for their conscious well-being. We are at rest only when all our relations with God and the outer world are right, and when our inner being is harmonized with itself, and supplied with appropriate objects. To know God for our friend, to have our being fixed on and satisfied in Him, and so to be reconciled to all circumstances, and a friend of all men,—this is peace; and the path to such a blessed condition is shown us only by that Sun of Righteousness whom the loving heart of God has sent into the darkness and torpor of the benighted wanderers in the desert. The national reference has faded from the song, and, though it still speaks of "us" and "our," we cannot doubt that Zacharias both saw more deeply into the salvation which Christ would bring than to limit it to breaking an earthly yoke, and deemed more worthily and widely of its sweep, than to confine it within narrower bounds than the whole extent of the dreary darkness which it came to banish from all the world.

LESSON IV.

"The Herald Angels Sing."

ST. LUKE ii. 8-20.

8. "And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

9. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

10. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

11. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

12. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

13. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

14. Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

15. And it came to pass as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.

16. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.

17. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.

18. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.

19. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.

20. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them."

EVERY particular of this announcement of the birth of Christ is significant. "There were shepherds." Possibly they were among those who were "waiting for the consolation of Israel"; but we do not know that they were.

They were simple rustics, poor working men, going about their nightly tasks, and thinking more of these than of angels and opened heavens. Why were they the recipients of the glad news? Just because they were not wise men after the flesh, nor mighty, nor great. It was fitting that the universal gospel should first be spoken to humble men. Christ is all men's Christ, because He comes to take away the universal disease, and to give the "common salvation." Therefore the good tidings were first spoken, not to priests at the altar, or kings on the throne, but to plain peasants, busy about their ordinary work. Here is the beginning of the true democracy which Christ establishes. All are alike in their need and in their place in His heart. Science and culture begin at the top, and filter downwards; religious movements begin generally at the bottom, and ascend. The occupation reminds us of Moses in the desert, and of David on the very plains where these men watched, and links with many an Old Testament word about the Shepherd of Israel, and hints at the sweet guidance of the "good Shepherd."

The time is significant. Night is the parent of holy thought,—the nurse of devout aspiration. Its darkness is often the chosen time for heavenly illumination. When earth is dark, heaven glows. The world was shrouded in night when Christ came, and into the thickest of its "gross darkness" His light burst. Yet the unobtrusiveness of His appearance, and the blending of secrecy with the manifestation of His power, are well typified by that glory which shone in the night, and was seen only by two or three poor men. The Highest came to His own in quietness, and almost stole into the world, and the whole life was of a piece with the birth and its announcement. There was the "hiding of His power."

How simply the appearance of the single angel and the

glory of the Lord is told! The evangelist thinks it the most natural thing in the world that heaven should send out its inhabitant on such an errand, and that the symbol of the Divine presence should fill the night with sudden splendour, which paled the bright Syrian stars. So it was, if that birth were what he tells us it was, the coming into human life of the manifest Deity. If we think of what he is telling, his quiet tone is profoundly impressive. The Incarnation is the great central miracle, the object of devout wonder to "principalities . . . in heavenly places." But not only do angels come to herald and to adore, but "the glory of the Lord," that visible brightness, which was the token of God's presence between the cherubim, and had been hid in the secret of the sanctuary while it shone, but had for centuries been absent from the temple, now blazes with undestructive light on the open hillside, and encircles them and the friendly angel by their side. What did that mean but that the birth of Jesus was the highest revelation of God, henceforth not to be shut within the sanctuary, but to be the companion of common lives, and to make all sacred by its presence. The glory of God shines where Christ is, and where it shines is the temple.

The angel is the first evangelist. He soothes the shepherds' fears by the word which is ever the first that Heaven's messengers need to speak to sinful men, and then pauses with that "Behold," which signalises his message as marvellous and weighty, to tell, first, in general terms, the joyfulness of his news and its special bearing on Israel, and then to unfold in few words the very heart of the gospel. Mark how steadily his words climb upwards, as it were, from the cradle to the throne. He begins with the lowly birth, and then rises, step by step, each word opening a wider and more wonderful prospect, to that climax beyond which there is nothing,—that this infant is "the Lord." The full

joy and tremendous wonder of the first word are not felt till we read the last. The birth is the birth of "the Lord." We cannot give any but the highest meaning to that sacred name, which could have but one meaning to a Jew. It was much that there was born a Saviour. Men need a deliverer, and the proclamation here is best kept in its widest meaning,—as of one who sets free from all ills outward and inward, and brings all outward and inward good. The Saviour of men must be a man, and therefore it is good news that He is born. It was much that Messiah should be born. The fulfilment of the wistful hopes of many generations, the accomplishment of prophecy, the Divine communication of the Spirit which fitted kings and priests of old for their work, the succession to David's throne, were all declared in that one announcement that the Christ was born in David's city. But that last word, "the Lord," crowns the wonder and the blessing, while it lays the only possible foundation for the other two names.

If, on the one hand, man's Saviour must be man, on the other, he must be more than man; and nothing short of a Divine man can heal the wounds of mankind, or open a fountain of blessing sufficient for their needs. Unless God become man, there can be no Saviour; nor can there be any Christ; for no mere humanity can bear the full gift of the Divine Spirit, which is Messiah's anointing for His office, nor discharge that office in all its depth and breadth. Many in this day try to repeat the angel's message, and leave out the last word, and then they wonder that it stirs little gladness and works no salvation. Let us be sure that, unless the birth at Bethlehem was the incarnation of Deity, it would have called forth no angel songs, nor will it work any deliverance, nor bring any joy to men.

Note that "to you." It meant, first, to Israel; but its proffer stretches far wider, and includes all mankind. The

angel speaks as one who has no share in this blessing. There is not envy, but there is the consciousness of non-participation, in his words; and perhaps we may venture to catch just a tone of wonder in them. "He took not hold of angels, but of the seed of Abraham." And yet, as the following angel chorus tells us, they too have a share in the blessing; and if the child in the cradle is not their Saviour, nor their brother, he is their Lord, and the blessed life and death which are our salvation are their instruction in depths of Divine love, which could not else be disclosed to them who never fell.

The "sign" which is to confirm the tidings might seem better fitted to contradict them. It is a strange mark by which to identify one born to such lofty tasks and dignities that He is, like all other infants, wrapped in swaddling-clothes, and, unlike the child of the poorest, lies in a manger. Humiliation is the sign of majesty, the depth of lowliness, a witness of the height of glory. To be born was such transcendent condescension that no lowliness of condition can add to it, but may symbolize it for us. The cradle that was too poor for a child of man is fitting for the Son of God.

The one voice has barely time to tell its message, when, as if unable longer to be silent, "suddenly" the "multitude of the heavenly host" pours out its praise. It is not my province to discuss the claims of the rival readings adopted by the Authorized and by the Revised Versions. I venture to adhere to the old reading, which divides the angel chorus into three clauses, of which the first and second may be regarded as the double result of that birth, while the third describes its deepest nature. Glory to God echoes through the highest heavens, and peace sits crowned on earth, because Jesus is born, in whose birth the infinite good pleasure of God comes to dwell among men. The glory

spoken of in the first clause is not that which shone round the shepherds, but is its reflection in the beings who dwell above the darkness of earth. The "glory of God" is objectively the light of His self-revelation, and subjectively it is the perception of that light and the praise which comes from that. The incarnation and work of Christ are the highest revelation of God. His "glory" lies, not in the eternity or infinity of His being, nor in the omniscience of His wisdom, nor in the might of His unwearied arm, so much as in the tenderness of His pity and the lowliness of His love.

These are the divinest things in God, and these shine forth from the child in the manger. That birth and life are a disclosure to the highest heavens. The blessed dwellers there share in the blessings which properly belong to us. Their part is to behold, and they grow in knowledge by beholding; for they learn new lessons of God's pity, condescension, and forgivingness, and new thoughts of man's capacity and dignity. Therefore new songs rise to their immortal lips, and the new light of His glory in itself flashes back from these beholders in new praise. The wondrous birth, which brings sweeter music into heaven, brings harmony to earth. Heaven needed only the increase of its possessed blessing, but the world needs the quieting of its discords, the soothing of its unrest, and, above all, the reconciliation of sinful hearts with God. The first peace which Christ brings is that between man and God, and then there follow peace between the contending elements in our own selves and peace with one another. The first clause of this song was fulfilled on the instant; the second is but partially fulfilled after nineteen centuries, but it too will not always be a hope or a dream. We can each secure its fulfilment in our own heart, and through Him be at amity with God and concord within ourselves. And the birth is

the occasion of both glory in heaven and peace on earth, because it brings among men the divine love. In Him God is "well pleased." The loving heart of God goes out to men in Jesus Christ, and the apostle's triumphant proclamation that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself," is but saying, in other words, what the angels sang. This is the foundation of all true understanding of the meaning of the Incarnation. It is the coming to men, and the dwelling among men, of the incarnate love of God. If we see it to be that, then we shall understand how it teaches angels a better praise, and brings to this discordant and restless world an else unattainable peace.

LESSON V.

Simeon's Twofold Prophecy.

St. Luke ii. 25-35.

25. "And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him.

26. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

27. And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for Him after the custom of the law,

28. Then took he Him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said,

29. Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word:

30. For mine eyes have seen Thy salvation,

31. Which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people;

32. A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel.

33. And Joseph and His mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of Him.

34. And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary His mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against;

35. (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

SIMEON is not expressly said to have been an old man, but he probably was so. How striking is the picture of the aged, worn face bending over the unconscious Child, whom he clasped in his withered arms! He may serve as a type of what Judaism ought to have been. Like him, it ought to have been looking eagerly for the Lord's Christ, and, when He came, to have taken Him in its arms and blessed Him. Like Simeon, it was to live till Messiah came, and should have recognised that His appearance

was the signal for its dissolution. His two short prophetic songs are singularly contrasted in tone: the one all sunny and hopeful, the other charged with sad forebodings. The one tells what Christ is sent to be; the other, what men's sin will make of God's great salvation.

I. We have in the first song the joyful welcome of the New by the expiring Old. Simeon's character is the ideal one of a true Israelite, on whom law and prophecy had wrought their intended effects. He is "just" in conduct and character, and his justice has its roots in devotion. He lives in the forward-looking attitude proper to Old Testament saints. Is not the ideal for us the same? We, too, have to base our morality on religion, and to nourish both by hope, which burns the clearer the nearer we come to the end of earthly life. Happy they who, like Simeon, are permitted to see and recognize at least the beginning of some new power in God's providence, which shall bring blessing after their eyes are closed! It is the reward sometimes granted to faithful hearts, who are saved by hope from the unreasoning clinging to the Old, that they are allowed at least to stand by the cradle of the New, and to forecast its victories.

Note the lovely repetition of "see" in the Divine promise to Simeon. He shall "see the Christ" before he "sees death," and the one vision will rob the other of all its terror. He comes to the temple, obedient to the Spirit's impulse, but probably not knowing what waited him, and is there before the entrance of Mary and her Child. The Divine voice tells him that this Infant is He, and his soul fills with a flood of wonder and praise. Did he know beforehand that he was to "see the Lord's Christ" in that guise of helplessness, or did he expect to see Him in strength and glory? He "receives" the Child, as performing the priest's office, and then, when he actually touched

the long-promised Hope of Israel, an Infant of six weeks old, lying perhaps asleep in his arms, no wonder that he broke into praise. But the course of his thoughts is noteworthy. His first is, "Here is the order for my release"; and it is a glad thought to him. Is there not a tone of relief, and of hailing a long-wished blessing, in the "now," —as if he had said, "At last, after weary waiting, it has come"? He speaks as a servant getting escape from toil. The word for "Lord" is that for an owner of slaves, which we have anglicized by "despot"; and that for "servant" corresponds, and means a bondsman.

It is a mistake to read the words as a prayer, which is the application often made of them. They are the recognition that now, at last, the great Owner has told the wearied toiler that he may stop work. The word for "lettest depart" implies some echo of the same metaphor, and may mean not only a change of place, but rather a dismissal from labour. And he feels that his end will now be peaceful; for his eyes have seen all that he desired, and he can close them, calmly satisfied. So these sweet words may teach us what death may be to us, if we hold Christ in our hearts. It may be the crowning act of obedience. Simeon felt himself to be the Lord's bondsman, and he loved the yoke. And he looks to his departure as "according to Thy word," not an unwelcome necessity from which he shrinks, nor an accident, which might have been averted for the time, nor the working of a mere natural law, but the result of God's will. He has set many tasks, and now this is the last. He has often said to his servant, "Go," and he went; now God is saying "Come," and he will gladly come. Again, death is to him the sweet rest after the day of toil. He hears the evening bell that tells another long day's work is done, and summons the workers from factory and smithy and mine to come out into purer air, and take

their wages. Again, it is to him the satisfied close of long expectancy. Life can give nothing more than the sight of the Christ, and he who sees Him may well be "satisfied with favour, and full of the goodness of the Lord," and may be willing to go, feeling that he has had enough.

The latter part of the song tells what the eyes of faith see in the Child in whom the eyes of sense see only weakness. This feeble suckling is the God-appointed means of salvation for all the world, who will pour light upon the Gentiles, and bring the glory to Israel of being their King. The precedence given to Messiah's work among the Gentiles is very remarkable. Mary's song did not look beyond help to "His servant Israel." Zacharias's put the office of the Messiah to Israel in the foreground, even if we take its close as sweeping a wider circle. But Simeon rejoices over a "salvation prepared" for "all peoples," and evidently places Israel's glory in the Christ mainly in this, that the light which was to flood the world was to shine from the midst of Israel. No shadows darken the glad picture. Salvation, which is light, is to stream through the earth, and Israel is to house, but not to monopolise, the radiance, and to find its glory therein. That was God's design in sending the great mercy of His Son. The Divine ideal and purpose are painted in unshaded colours.

What man makes God's salvation is the theme of the second of Simeon's prophecies. The wonder ascribed to Joseph and Mary has been thought to be inconsistent with their previous experiences. But had they only the capacity for wondering once? and was not the confirmation of the previous experience by Simeon's prophecy enough to bring a new wave of grateful astonishment over them? Note that while Joseph is named first, and called "His father" in verse 33, in accordance with the popular belief, Simeon, who speaks by inspiration, passes Joseph by altogether.

He may, or may not, have known the mystery of the birth, but he was guided to speak to the Virgin Mother only.

"Behold" summons her to give careful attention to what follows, and implies at once its importance and startling character. It is not what might have been expected from the preceding lyric prophecy. Can it be that the salvation prepared by God is a salvation not accepted by men? Who could suppose that in the very Israel of which Messiah was meant to be "the glory" there would be found tongues to sp eak against Him and heart to reject Him? But the wonder is true, and that Child, lying in Simeon's arms, is charged with the terrible power of being ruin as well as blessing. There is no more mournful nor more mysterious thought than that of man's power to turn the means of life into the occasion of death, and that power is never so strangely and mournfully displayed as in men's relations to "this Child."

Christ's double relation to men is here emphatically set forth. He may be either of two things. One or other of them He must be to all who come in contact with Him. Men do not remain on their former level after knowing who He is and what He can do for them. They either go up or down. It never can again be quite as it was before. Perhaps the familiar figure of the stone, which is either the foundation on which we build or the stumbling-block over which we fall, lies at the bottom of the words here. But, in any case, note that the saddest case is put first,—not because it is the main Divine intention, but because historically it became the most common result. Many in Israel stumbled and fell and were broken on that rock of offence.

How do we fall by contact with Christ? By the increase of self-conscious opposition, by the hardening following rejection, by the deeper condemnation which necessarily dogs the greater light, with its blacker shadow. How do

we rise by Christ? In all ways and to all heights to which humanity can soar. He raises us from the lowest depth of sin and condemnation to the heights of likeness to Himself, and finally to the glory of participation in His throne. The representation of Christ's work here is twofold, but the same soul may experience both. It is a "rising again" that is spoken of, and that may either be the raising of those who had previously fallen over the stone of stumbling, as may be the blessed lot of all rejecters of His grace, like a Paul, and many another since; or it may be the raising of men from the lowness of their selfish, sinful lives. In either case there is a resurrection, and Jesus not only is able to uphold all that are falling, but to raise all those that have fallen and are bowed down. It is a solemn alternative for us all. Either we rise or we fall by reason of our seeing Christ. He is life to those who take Him for their all, and death to those who turn from Him.

Simeon further forecasts the fate of the Child as "a sign that shall be spoken against." The perfect and ultimate Divine self-manifestation though He is, denial and opposition will still be possible; and such is men's unwillingness to be drawn to the love of God and the enjoyment of light, that, if contradiction be possible, it will be actual. A sign from heaven, but yet spoken against, is a paradox which only too accurately forebodes the history of the gospel in all ages.

How strange to the Virgin Mother, in all the wonder and joy of these blissful early days, must that prediction of the sorrows that were to pierce her heart have sounded! The sword is connected with the contradiction of the previous clause, and so must mean the grief of Mary at her Son's rejection, which culminated at Calvary when she stood by the cross.

There is no need to put the reference to Mary in a

parenthesis. The purpose of that double effect, of which the issue is to be her pierced heart, is the disclosing of the hidden dispositions of many hearts. Hers was to be pierced, theirs will be laid open. A man's attitude to Jesus Christ is the man's revelation of his deepest self. It is the outcome of his inmost nature, and betrays his whole character. How in His earthly life He discovered men to themselves and to their fellows, and how He does so yet! He is the test of what we are. Our relation to Him writes in plain letters whether at bottom we love good or evil. He comes like the light into some cave, where the flock of darkness-loving creatures are roused by its gleam to flap about it, and try to put it out. Our reception or rejection of Jesus Christ reveals what we are, and determines what we shall be. If He leads us to fall before Him in true penitence and conscious helplessness, He will raise us up, nor ever cease to lift us by His strong hand until He sets us at His own right hand in the heavenly place. Howsoever high He rises, even up to the throne of God, so high will He carry with Him His happy servant.

LESSON VI.

The Father's House and the Mother's Cottage.

St. Luke ii. 40-52.

40. "And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon Him.

41. Now His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover.

42. And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast.

43. And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and His mother knew not of it.

44. But they, supposing Him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought Him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance.

45. And when they found Him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking Him.

46. And it came to pass, that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them and asking them questions.

47. And all that heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers.

48. And when they saw Him, they were amazed: and His mother said unto Him, Son, why hast Thou thus dealt with us? behold Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing.

49. And He said unto them, How is it that ye sought Me? wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?

50. And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them.

51. And He went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but His mother kept all these sayings in her heart.

52. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man."

THE reticence of the Gospels as to Christ's early life is a strong presumption in their favour. Legend would have surrounded His boyhood with a swarm of wonders, as, indeed, the Apocryphal Gospels have done.

But the fact that this is all that we are told of thirty years of His life is a token that we are dealing with sober history, quite uninfected with a morbid love of the miraculous. It is a token, too, that this is history with a purpose. Contrast the brevity of the narrative of the childhood with the minuteness of that of the cross, and learn what was the centre of interest to the evangelists in our Lord's life. Luke's Gospel is the gospel of the Son of man, and hence the greater length at which he gives the early days, and the stress laid on the growth of Jesus from infancy to boyhood (ver. 40), and from boyhood to manhood (ver. 52).

I. We may throw these two verses together, and consider their teaching as to the human development of the Son of man. They are evidently meant to recall the similar notices of the growth of Samuel and of John (Luke i. 80). Those referring to Samuel, which so sweetly break in on the increasing sin of Eli's sons, like a young tree springing among ruins, describe him as growing "before the Lord"; as "in favour both with the Lord, and also with men"; as having the Lord growingly "with him, and did let none of His words fall to the ground." So grows a prophet soul in the seclusion of the tabernacle, pure amid corruption, and gradually increasing in conscious Divine communion, and recognised authority as God's messenger. Of John it is said that He "grew and waxed strong in spirit"; and again, that "the hand of the Lord"—the emblem of power —"was with Him."

The infant Jesus grew as the others, with the natural human development, and waxed strong; but even then He was "filled with wisdom," such as was capable of being possessed by perfect humanity at that age, and which was a growing wisdom (ver. 52). His child-spirit was like a vase, which had the power of dilating, and at each moment was full, but at each moment could contain more, and had all

that it could contain. "Wisdom" here is both intellectual and moral. The reason for that fulness was that "the grace of God was upon Him,"—not "the hand" only, which strengthened the strong John; nor only "the Lord with Him," as with Samuel; but the loving complacency of God rested on Him, dove-like, abiding, and caressing. That was the child Christ, the pattern for the youngest, who has sanctified the early days by passing through them. The last verse of our lesson completes the picture of the growth of the boy into the youth and man. He carried the early wisdom, which was goodness as well, unsullied and increasing, through the years of youth. "The child was father to the man," and he had no need to look back to earlier and purer days. Luke puts His growth in wisdom before that in stature. The two went on side by side, but the physical was subordinated, as it should ever be, to the spiritual. That is not the order which the lads of this generation seem to believe in. Athletics are good, but wisdom is better.

The youthful Jesus, thus maturing in Himself, grew, too, as a consequence, in "favour (grace) with God and men." The unfolded nature could receive more of the Father's smile, as the opened flower more sunshine than can the bud. The time for men to hate was not yet come. The very traits of character which in the man provoked half-seeing dislike, in the youth won favour. The experience has often been repeated since. We need not here discuss the deep questions involved in the growth of Jesus. They are only one form of the mystery of His incarnation. If He was truly a man, He must have been truly a child; and if He was truly a child, He must have grown to be a man. Adam did not grow; but Christ did, and so came near to children as Himself one of them.

II. The lovely incident of Christ in the temple shows us

the Son of God, conscious of His sonship, and at home in His Father's house. The boy's lingering in Jerusalem after the glad company of the villagers from Nazareth had set out homewards was but the carrying out of the very meaning of His being taken up to the feast. It was the assumption of His place as "a son of the law," and the recognition of higher duties than those to earthly parents. How far that consciousness began under the stimulus of the temple and the feast is a question on which assertion is the less likely to be true the more confident it is. At all events, the consciousness was then expressed for the first time.

How vividly the simple story sets the scene before us,—the long, streaming march of the returning Nazarenes, the confusion, the greetings and talk among the shifting groups, and the gathering together of the families at the halting-place for the night! There would be little sleep for Mary that night, and with the morning light she and Joseph would set off, seeking as they went sadly over the yesterday's march. They would probably reach the city before dark; for the first day's march is generally short, and anxiety would lend swiftness to the mother's feet. There would, therefore, probably be a part of the second day spent in searching among friends; for Christ's words show that the temple was not the first place where they had looked for Him. There were many other places in the city which would draw a boy more powerfully than it. They would look into the hall where the rabbis taught, "just to make sure" that He was not there. And there He was,—as a scholar, not a teacher, asking questions in the recognised fashion.

The picture has been robbed of all beauty, truth, and value as a pattern, by making Jesus out to have been instructing rather than learning. He did not set such a bad example to studious youth, nor transcend the sweet

modesty and humility which give grace to young enthusiasm and eagerness to know. He was a true child; and if the hearers wondered, it was not at an infant prodigy putting Himself forward as a teacher, but at the docility and modest, serious wisdom of a boy disciple.

Mary's question and remonstrance have a note of complaint in them, which shallow critics think inconsistent with her knowledge. But does a mother's love always work by logic? And would not twelve years of submissive childhood (of which the question is witness) be more powerful in determining the every-day relations with her Child than even these memories which she kept in her heart? The answer might well startle her. It has not a word of regret, nor of apology. A strange ring of remoteness from her is in it; the same which afterwards sounded in "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" For the first time His act and word show that to Him there is something more sacred than a mother's wish, or even sorrow. Note Christ's consciousness of a special sonship to God. "My Father" is opposed to "thy father and I." He knows Himself to be the Son of God, and perhaps, Mary would think, has penetrated the secret of His birth. At all events, His first recorded utterance speaks, though from boyish lips, the same clear and unique consciousness which was breathed unbroken over all His life, and was triumphantly expressed in His last dying words, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit."

Why should they have sought Him, as if in doubt where He might be? One place only was His—His Father's house. Note, too, his consciousness of a Divine vocation. The supplement, "house," is probably correct; but, even if we adopt it, the idea conveyed by the other supplement, "business," is implied. The consciousness of sonship necessarily brings the accompanying obligation of filial

obedience, and so we have here the first occurrence of that solemn "must" which was ever present to His mind, —"I must work the works of Him that sent Me." "The Son of man must suffer many things, and be . . . killed, and . . . rise again." Beautiful and profound is the fact that Christ's first words preserved to us are full at once of the dignity of the only-begotten Son and of the obedience of Him who came to do the will of the Father. Something analogous to this event comes in every young life, when duty and individual responsibility assume new meaning, and the ties of the childhood's home are weakened. Jesus is the example for all who are stepping from the careless immunities of early childhood into the graver region of budding youth. Well for all such if, as by Him, God's house is felt to be their home, and God's will the only thing more sacred than their mother's love.

III. Verse 51 gives us the picture of the Son of man in His human obedience. He returns to the humble home, "and was subject unto them." It is significant that this follows the assertion and act in the temple. A Samuel might be brought up a Nazarite, far from Hannah's home in Mount Ephraim, and living in the tabernacle; a John might be "in the deserts till the day of his showing to Israel,"—but Jesus had to be "kindly with His kind," and, having spoken once the secret of His life, that He must be in His Father's house and do His will, then goes back to Mary's cottage, and does her bidding for eighteen uneventful years, that we may learn how every place may be the house of God, and the meanest tasks the will of our Father in heaven. His "soul was like a star," but it did not "dwell apart." He travelled "on life's common way in cheerful godliness," and His "heart the lowliest duties on herself did lay." Such willing discharge of small duties is the right result of knowing one's self to be God's son, in

such way as we may know it, and we have Jesus for our pattern in all lowly service. Luther says graphically, in one of his sermons: "Whatever father or mother wanted done in the house,—fetching water, drink, bread, meat, looking after the house, and other things of that sort, whatever He was bidden that did the dear little Jesus [*das liebe Jesulein*] like any other child. And so all good, pious children should say, 'Ah! I am not worthy to come to the honour of being like the child Jesus, and doing what He, my Lord Christ, did.' If He did what His parents bade Him, though they were common small things, what fine children should we be, if we followed His example!"

What a lesson is here of patient waiting for the wider sphere! Young people conscious of power, or often only stung by restlessness, are apt to think home a very contracted field, and to despise its quiet monotony, and chafe at its imposition of petty obediences. Jesus Christ lived till He was thirty in a poor little village, buried among the hills, worked as a carpenter, did what His mother bade Him, and was content till His "hour" came. Vanity, selfish ambition, proud independence, are always in a hurry to get away from the modest shelter of the mother's house, and make a mark in the world. The prodigal, who wants riotous living, is in a hurry too. But the true Son is the more a son of Mary because He feels Himself the Son of God, and nourishes His pure spirit in sweet seclusion, which yet is not solitude, till the time comes for larger service in a wider sphere.

LESSON VII.

The Prophet of the Highest

St. Luke iii. 7-22.

7. "Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

8. Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

9. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees; every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

10. And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then?

11. He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise.

12. Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do?

13. And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you.

14. And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages.

15. And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ or not;

16. John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose; He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire;

17. Whose fan is in His hand, and He will throughly purge His floor, and will gather the wheat into His garner; but the chaff He will burn with fire unquenchable.

18. And many other things in his exhortation preached he unto the people.

19. But Herod the tetrarch, being reproved by him for Herodias his brother Philip's wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done,

20. Added yet this above all, that he shut up John in prison.

21. Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened,

22. And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art My beloved Son; in Thee I am well pleased."

JOHN is painted in this lesson in three aspects,—as preacher of repentance and righteousness, as herald of Messiah, and as boldly rebuking royal profligacy, and therefore a martyr. His part in Christ's baptism, and the baptism itself, are lightly touched, while attention is concentrated on the signs of Divine abiding and approval which attended it.

I. Luke substantially coincides with Matthew in his version of the fiery words of the preacher of repentance and righteousness, but adds the section containing advice to various classes, and so separates more distinctly the second part of John's message, namely, the announcement of the coming Messiah, from the first. It was a strange, rough reception which he gave the multitude. Was he not thankful to see them flocking to him? Why did he fling these almost fierce rebukes in their faces? "Who hath warned?" Might they not have answered, "You;" and "Why should we be called the brood of vipers, because we have come at your call?" But what moved his anger was the very fact that they had come to be baptized, as if that was going to do them any good, and was fleeing from the coming wrath. The disciples, who miss all the more inward and deeper meanings of the teacher, and grasp only the husk of some form, give him a sharper pain than even the deaf ears that hear nothing; and, alas! such scholars are generally in the majority. The insufficiency of the mere baptism underlies the "therefore" in verse 8. The fruits will prove the presence of repentance, without which the baptism, of which it is a sign, will be naught.

This first sledge-hammer blow shatters one false trust; namely, that in external ceremonial as cleansing. Another swing of the mace crushes another; namely, that in natural descent from the heir of the promise. Messiah was to be their Messiah, the people thought. How graphic the

"begin" of verse 8 is, as if John saw the proud, foolish boast rising in their faces! He does not tell them that they are not Abraham's children unless they have Abraham's "righteousness," but that God can admit "these stones"—the water-worn rocks littering the channel of Jordan—to the privileges in which they trusted. Surely this points, however dimly, to the transference of the promises to the Gentiles. The third turn in the hot stream of indignant rebuke goes deeper still in opposition to his hearers' baseless confidences; for it attacks their whole conception of the mission of the Messiah, and declares it to be an immediately impending work of judgment.

Everything is ready, and the moment is near. The gleaming axe lies at the root of the tree, and He whose hand will wield it will be there presently. Israel is Messiah's orchard, and when He comes it is for judgment. The principle of the judgment is plain, and common sense would teach it. Fruitless trees must come down. They are good for fuel, and nothing else. That was the shape which Christ's kingdom wore in John's eyes; and, though we know a great deal more about it than he did, and see aspects of it as its chief ones which were all but wholly hidden from him, we cannot venture to lose sight of what he saw so clearly. Christ does come for judgment, and the only thing that meets His judgment is righteousness. It is not needful to bear bad fruit in order to be consumed. The negative character of not bearing good is fatal. How that good fruit is to be produced from the barren and corrupt stem is not in John's commission to say. We know that only if we abide in Him shall we bring forth fruit. But the law which John announced, and the aspect of Christ's coming which he proclaimed, remain for ever true.

The questions of the three classes peculiar to Luke are called forth by John's warning, and ask what is "fruit."

Note the "then" in verse 10. The A B C of morality, charity, justice, abstinence from class vices, are all that he requires. These homely pieces of goodness would be the best "fruits" of repentance. Not to do what everybody in the same calling does, and I used to do, is a great proof of a changed man, though the thing itself may be very lowly virtue. We need the lesson quite as much as the multitudes, or the publicans and soldiers.

II. Verses 15-17 give John as the herald. They coincide with Matthew, but have a little preamble peculiar to Luke, which represents the subsequent declaration as drawn from John by the doubts of the people as to his being the Christ. It is a disclaimer as well as a prediction, and so is an instance of the forerunner's grand, immovable humility. Note, first, his clear conception of his own limits. His baptism was with water, the symbol of outward cleansing, which might or might not be accompanied by real purifying, and, if it were, was still but cold and outward. Note, next, the bowing down of the strong, stern spirit before the coming One. How he ascribes to Him superiority even in the "strength" which was his characteristic, and how he delights to prostrate himself as unworthy to be His slave! He stood undaunted before kings, and bore himself as above his generation. Pharisees and priests could not make him own their authority, but he would think it honour too great to be let kneel at those sacred feet and untie their sandals. Is any humility so touching as that of a strong and lofty spirit? Is not the gift of permission to serve Jesus in the humblest offices a gift beyond our deserts? Note, further, the profound insight into Christ's work. It is twofold,—a baptism in the quickening fire of the Holy Spirit, and a sifting, followed by the destruction of the refuse as by fire. The emblem of fire contrasts Christ's baptism with his own, which was in water, and implies the difference between

mere outward cleansing, and inward, penetrating, kindling, and transforming life. It contrasts with the other fire, which consumes the chaff. Every man must be plunged in one or other of these. Either the quickening and blessed fire of the Spirit, which melts hard and warms cold hearts, and turns the dead matter of our selfish natures into a warm blaze of loving enthusiasm, or else the consuming fire, is the choice before us all.

One thing or the other Jesus brings to every soul which comes in contact with Him. It is joy, life, purity, to be immersed in the one. It is worse than death to be swept into the other. The fruitless trees and the chaff have the same destiny, because they mean the same people; and it is worth observing that these two figures occur side by side in Psalm i. as here. Chaff is rootless, lifeless, empty. So is every life which is not rooted in Jesus, and drawing from Him the inspiration of a higher life which will bring forth much fruit. The threshing-floor is His, and His is the garner. He is king and owner of Israel, and steps into the place of Jehovah (Isa. xxi. 10). The people expected Messiah's coming to make them first of the nations, but their pre-eminence was but that they were first to feel His sifting work. Nor is the garner less His. He is the Lord of the place where all the wheat is stored, even as fuller revelation teaches us that He holds the keys of death and Hades, and opens His own heaven for all believers.

III. Why does Luke anticipate the order of events to introduce the notice of John's imprisonment at this point? Probably, to mark more distinctly the introductory character of his ministry. Luke will finish up his summary of John, and, as it were, get him out of the way before He brings John's Lord upon the scene. This Gospel has no account of John's martyrdom. The morning star fades before sunrise. The notice of his imprisonment completes Luke's

outline of his character and work, as it gives his fearless rebuke of highly placed vice, and shows him the same stern preacher of the same righteousness to royal sinners as to the multitude. Nay, his message to the crowd was gentler than that to the king; for while he "preached good tidings" to them, mingled with his "exhortations," he had only "reproof" for the hardened profligate on the throne. How John got access to the "king's houses," of which he was no frequenter, and in what fashion he rebuked Herod, whether privately or publicly, we do not know. There is no reference here to Herod's fear and involuntary respect for the "just and holy" prophet. A heart half softened and returning to its hardness is harder than before. The climax of a bad man's guilt is his persecution of those who would win him to goodness; for it indicates his conviction that they speak truth, and his resolution to silence them and it. The martyr's imprisonment seals his own faithfulness and the king's condemnation.

IV. The condensed account of the baptism omits the name of John, and the significant conversation between Jesus and him, recorded by Matthew. All the light is concentrated on the single figure of Jesus. We have done with John; and the administrator of the rite, and the rite itself, are less important than what followed. The baptism is put into a subordinate clause, and contemplated as following on the people's being baptized. That is to say, in it Christ took upon Him the fellowship of man's weakness and sinfulness; and because His brethren needed cleansing and its symbol, He, the sinless, took part of the same. Brief, then, as the reference is, it contains the true meaning of Christ's baptism. Luke adds that He was "praying." The Gospel of the Son of man especially notes Christ's prayers as the token of His true manhood. The signs following were the answer, and may help us to understand

the burden of the prayer. And the connection between the petition and the opened heavens may bring us the sweet confidence that for us, too, unworthy though we are, the same blessed gift and voice will fall on our hearts and ears, if we, in His name, pray as He did.

The sign is threefold. The opened heavens open not only for the descending dove, but for the ascending aspiration and gaze, and symbolise the access thither which that Son had, who "is in heaven" even while He has come from heaven and remains on earth. Joined to Him by faith, we, too, may walk beneath an ever-open heaven, and look up through the lower blue to the very throne, His home and ours. The descending dove recalls the brooding spirit hovering over chaos, and symbolises the gentle Spirit of God dwelling in Him who was meek and lowly of heart. The whole fulness of that Spirit falls and abides on Him. What must that manhood have been which could sustain such a weight of glory! It dwelt in Him that He might impart it to us, and the Dove of God might nest in our poor hearts. The solemn voice which spoke brought to Jesus Himself, in His manhood, the assurance of His Sonship, of the perfect love and satisfaction of the Father in Him. It was meant for Him, but not for Him alone. If we accept its witness, we, too, become sons; and if we find God in Him, we shall find Him well pleased even with us, and be "accepted in the Beloved."

LESSON VIII.

The Prince of Light and the Prince of Darkness.

ST. LUKE iv. 1-13.

1. "And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness,

2. Being forty days tempted of the devil. And in those days He did eat nothing: and when they were ended, He afterward hungered.

3. And the devil said unto Him, If thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread.

4. And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.

5. And the devil, taking Him up into an high mountain, showed unto Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time.

6. And the devil said unto Him, All this power will I give Thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it.

7. If Thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be Thine.

8. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.

9. And he brought Him to Jerusalem, and set Him on a pinnacle of the temple, and said unto Him, If Thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down from hence:

10. For it is written, He shall give His angels charge over Thee, to keep Thee:

11. And in their hands they shall bear Thee up, lest at any time Thou dash thy foot against stone.

12. And Jesus answering said unto him, It is said, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.

13. And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from Him for a season."

IF we adopt the Revised Version's reading and rendering, the whole of the forty days in the desert were one long assault of Jesus by Satan, during which the consciousness of bodily needs was suspended by the intensity of spiritual

conflict. Exhaustion followed this terrible tension, and the enemy chose that moment of physical weakness to bring up his strongest battalions. What a contrast these days made with the hour of the baptism! And yet both the opened heavens and the grim fight were needful parts of Christ's preparation. As true man, He could be truly tempted; as perfect man, suggestions of evil could not arise within, but must be presented from without. He must know our temptations if He is to help us in them, and He must "first bind the strong man" if He is afterwards "to spoil his house." It is useless to discuss whether the tempter appeared in visible form, or carried Jesus from place to place. The presence and voice were real, though probably if any eye had looked on nothing would have been seen but the solitary Jesus, sitting still in the wilderness.

I. The first temptation is that of the Son of man tempted to distrust God. Long experience had taught the tempter that his most taking baits were those which appealed to the appetites and needs of the body, and so he tries these first. The run of men are drawn to sin by some form or other of these, and the hunger of Jesus laid Him open to their power, —if not on the side of delights of sense, yet on the side of wants. The tempter quotes the Divine voice at the baptism with almost a sneer, as if the hungry fainting Man before him was a strange "Son of God." The suggestion sounds innocent enough; for there would have been no necessary harm in working a miracle to feed Himself. But its evil is betrayed by the words, "If thou art the Son of God," and the answer of our Lord, which begins emphatically with "man," puts us on the right track to understand why He repelled the insidious proposal even while He was faint with hunger. To yield to it would have been to shake off for His own sake the human conditions which He had taken for our sakes, and to seek to cease to be Son of man in act-

ing as Son of God. He takes no notice of the title given by Satan, but falls back on His brotherhood with man, and accepts the laws under which they live as His conditions.

The quotation from Deuteronomy, which Luke gives in a less complete form than Matthew, implies, even in that incomplete form, that bread is not the only means of keeping a man in life, but that God can feed Him, as He did Israel in its desert life, with manna; or, if manna fails, by the bare exercise of His Divine will. Therefore Jesus will not use His power as Son of God, because to do so would at once take Him out of the fellowship with man, and would betray His distrust of God's power to feed Him there in the desert. How soon His confidence was vindicated Matthew tells us. As soon as the devil departed from Him, "angels came and ministered unto Him." The soft rush of their wings brought solace to His spirit, wearied with struggle, and once again "man did eat angels' food."

This first temptation teaches us much. It makes the manhood of our Lord pathetically true, as showing Him bearing the prosaic but terrible pinch of hunger, carried almost to its fatal point. It teaches us how innocent and necessary wants may be the devil's levers to overturn our souls. It warns us against severing ourselves from our fellows by the use of distinctive powers for our own behoof. It sets forth humble reliance on God's sustaining will as best for us, even if we are in the desert, where, according to sense, we must starve; and it magnifies the Brother's love, who for our sakes waived the prerogatives of the Son of God, that He might be the brother of the poor and needy.

II. The second temptation is that of the Messiah, tempted to grasp His dominion by false means. The devil finds that he must try a subtler bait. Foiled on the side of the physical nature, he begins to apprehend that he has to deal with One loftier than the mass of men; and so he brings

out the glittering bait, which catches the more finely organised natures. Where sense fails, ambition may succeed. There is nothing said now about "Son of God." The relation of Jesus to God is not now the point of attack, but His hoped-for relation to the world. Did Satan actually transport the body of Jesus to some eminence? Probably not. It would not have made the vision of all the kingdoms any more natural if he had. The remarkable language "showed . . . all . . . in a moment of time" describes a physical impossibility, and most likely is meant to indicate some sort of diabolic phantasmagoria, flashed before Christ's consciousness, while His eyes were fixed on the silent, sandy waste.

There is much in Scripture that seems to bear out the boast that the kingdoms are at Satan's disposal. But he is "the father of lies" as well as the "prince of this world," and we may be very sure that his authority loses nothing in his telling. If we think how many thrones have been built on violence and sustained by crime, how seldom in the world's history the right has been uppermost, and how little of the fear of God goes to the organisation of society, even to-day, in so-called Christian countries, we shall be ready to feel that in this boast the devil told more truth than we like to believe. Note that he acknowledges that the power has been "given," and on the fact of the delegation of it rests the temptation to worship. He knew that Jesus looked forward to becoming the world's King, and he offers easy terms of winning the dignity. Very cunning he thought himself, but he had made one mistake. He did not know what kind of kingdom Jesus wished to establish. If it had been one of the bad old pattern, like Nebuchadnezzar's or Cæsar's, his offer would have been tempting, but it had no bearing on one who meant to reign by love, and to buy love by loving to the death.

Worshipping the devil could only help to set up a devil's kingdom. Jesus wanted nothing of the "glory" which had been "given" him. His answer, again taken from Deuteronomy, is His declaration that His kingdom is a kingdom of obedience, and that He will only reign as God's representative. It defines His own position and the genius of His dominion. It would come to the tempter's ears as the broken law, which makes his misery and turns all his "glory" into ashes. This is our Lord's decisive choice, at the outset of His public work, of the path of suffering and death. He renounces all aid from such arts and methods as have built up the kingdoms of earth, and presents Himself as the antagonist of Satan and his dominion. Henceforth it is war to the knife.

For us, the lessons are plain. We have to learn what sort of kingdom Jesus sets up. We have to beware, in our own little lives, of ever seeking to accomplish good things by questionable means, of trying to carry on Christ's work with the devil's weapons. When churches lower the standard of Christian morality, because keeping it up would alienate wealthy or powerful men, when they wink hard at sin which pays, when they enlist envy, jealousy, emulation of the baser sort in the service of religious movements, are they not worshipping Satan? and will not their gains be such as he can give, and not such as Christ's kingdom grows by? Let us learn, too, to adore and be thankful for the calm and fixed decisiveness with which Jesus chose from the beginning, and trod until the end, with bleeding but unreluctant feet, the path of suffering on His road to His throne.

III. The third temptation tempts the worshipping Son to tempt God. Luke arranges the temptations partly from a consideration of locality, the desert and the mountain being near each other, and partly in order to bring out a certain sequence in them. First comes the appeal to the physical

nature, then that to the finer desires of the mind; and these having been repelled, and the resolve to worship God having been spoken by Jesus, Luke's third temptation is addressed to the devout soul, as it looks to the cunning but shallow eyes of the tempter. Matthew, on the other hand, in accordance with his point of view, puts the specially Messianic temptation last. The actual order is as undiscoverable as unimportant. In Luke's order there is substantially but one change of place, from the solitude of the wilderness to the temple. As we have said, the change was probably not one of the Lord's body, but only of the scenes flashed before His mind's eye. "The pinnacle of the temple" may have been the summit that looked down into the deep valley, where the enormous stones of the lofty wall still stand, and which must have been at a dizzy height above the narrow glen on the one side and the temple courts on the other. There is immense, suppressed rage and malignity in the recurrence of the sneer, "If thou art the Son of God," and in the use of Christ's own weapon of defence, the quotation of Scripture.

What was wrong in the act suggested? There is no reference to the effect on the beholders, as has often been supposed; and, if we are correct in supposing that the whole temptation was transacted in the desert, there could be none. But plainly the point of it was the suggestion that Jesus should, of His own accord and needlessly, put Himself in danger, expecting God to deliver Him. It looked like devout confidence; it was really "tempting God." It looked like the very perfection of the trust with which, in the first round of this duel, Christ had conquered; it was really distrust, as putting God to proof whether He would keep His promises or no. It looked like the very perfection of that worship with which He had overcome in the second round of the fight; it was really self-will in the mask of

devoutness. It tempted God, because it sought to draw Him to fulfil to a man on self-chosen paths His promises to those who walk in ways which He has appointed.

We trust God when we look to Him to deliver us in perils met in meek acceptance of His will. We tempt Him when we expect Him to save us from those encountered on roads that we have picked out for ourselves. Such presumption disguised as filial trust is the temptation besetting the higher regions of experience, to which the fumes of animal passions and the less gross but more dangerous airs from the desires of the mind do not ascend. Religious men who have conquered these have still this foe to meet. Spiritual pride, the belief that we may venture into dangers either to our natural or to our religious life, where no call of duty takes us, the thrusting ourselves, unbidden, into circumstances where nothing but a miracle can save us,—these are the snares which Satan lays for souls which have broken his coarser nets. The three answers with which Jesus overcame are the mottoes by which we shall conquer. Trust God, by whose will we live. Worship God, in whose service we get all of this world that is good for us. Tempt not God, whose angels keep us in our ways, when they are His ways, and who reckons trust that is not submission to His ways to be tempting God, and not trusting Him.

"All the temptation" was ended. So these three made a complete whole, and the quiver of the enemy was for the time empty. He departed "for a season," or, rather, until an opportunity. He was foiled when he tried to tempt by addressing desires. His next assault will be at Gethsemane and Calvary, when dread and the shrinking from pain and death will be assailed as vainly.

LESSON IX.

The Nearer to Jesus, the Farther from Christ

St. Luke iv. 16-32.

16. "And he came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up: and, as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read.

17. And there was delivered unto Him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written,

18. The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; He hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised.

19. To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

20. And He closed the book, and He gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on Him.

21. And He began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.

22. And all bare Him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph's son?

23. And He said unto them, Ye will surely say unto me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself: whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in thy country.

24. And He said, Verily I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country.

25. But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land;

26. But unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow.

27. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian.

28. And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath.

29. And rose up, and thrust Him out of the city, and led Him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast Him down headlong.

30. But He passing through the midst of them went His way,

31. And came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and taught them on the Sabbath days.

32. And they were astonished at His doctrine: for His word was with power."

THE Gospel of the King, which is Matthew's, begins Christ's ministry with the laws of His kingdom, in the Sermon on the Mount. The Gospel of the servant, which is Mark's, plunges at once into the narrative of His acts. The Gospel of the Son of man, which is Luke's, keeps up the note struck in its accounts of the birth and youth by giving as His first reported discourse this one, in the place "where He had been brought up," and in the synagogue into which it had been "His custom" from childhood to enter on the Sabbath. It was a natural feeling which drew His feet thither, that He might win disciples among the companions of His boyhood. The events of His first visit to Jerusalem, as given by John's Gospel, had probably just preceded; and the rumour of these, as well as of His miracles in Capernaum, may have brightened His reputation among His fellow-villagers. One can fancy the curious looks of the congregation, and the busy remembrances filling His heart on that Sabbath.

The lesson falls into two parts; the first giving Christ's conception of His work, and the effect that produced on the listeners; the second giving His view of its universality, and the effect of that.

I. There would be a hush in the synagogue as He stood up, in accordance with custom, to read. The attendant handed Him the roll for the second lesson of the service. He "found the place" implies not, as is often said, a providential guidance, but a search for the passage which He chose. He probably read from the Hebrew, but we cannot tell whether He or Luke introduced the quotation in verse 18 from Isaiah lviii. However that may be, it was surely Jesus who stopped in the middle of a verse, and said nothing about "the day of vengeance of our God," but kept the sweet and radiant side of His mission unshaded by any terror. It was intended to be unsullied light, and

He will not speak of the attendant possible darkness. He seated Himself, as became a teacher, and then, amid the eager attention of all, declared at length (for Luke's "began" shows that He abbreviates the discourse) His claims to be Messiah.

This solemn beginning of His ministry, as recorded in Luke, suggests many thoughts. Note how definite and complete His conception of His work is, from the first. He knew what He had come to be and do. His aims neither cleared nor grew, but were sun-clear and world-wide from the beginning. That is not the experience of God's other servants. They are led by undreamed-of ways to an end which would have stunned or crushed them, if known at the starting-post. But Jesus had no mist on His future, nor any unconsciousness of His significance.

Note, too, that Christ's great theme was always Himself. Other teachers have all had to say, "We preach not ourselves, but——" This Man did preach Himself. He has said many glorious and sweet words about God, many tender things about our sorrows, many solemn commands of duties, many deep utterances piercing to the heart of things present and to come, but His truly characteristic and unparalleled teaching is about Himself. His demand is not, believe this or that which I tell, but believe in Me; and there, in the synagogue, among old men who had seen Him in His cradle, and young ones who had played with Him in the streets, and neighbours who had known Him as the maker of their rustic carpentry, He begins His ministry by claiming that the great prophecy is fulfilled in Him. If this is not the speech of incarnate Divinity, it is the boasting of arrogant egotism. How does such a sermon agree with "meek and lowly"? and did anybody else ever proclaim his own meekness side by side with such words, and get people to believe him?

And what a work shines before Him! He lays His hand on the prophet's utterance, and says, "It is mine." The prophet was also a prophecy, and His anointing with the Spirit to proclaim a year of enfranchisement and jubilee was but a foreshadowing of the true Speaker for and from God, who proclaimed and brought true freedom. Mark Christ's consciousness of possessing the Divine Spirit. It is the permanent effect of the sign at His baptism. Note, too, His assurance that He is the Anointed, the Christ. The Samaritan woman had received an equally plain statement, and now the very people who had been most familiar with Him hear a claim which must have startled them, and was seldom repeated until He stood before the high-priest.

Observe, too, the view of men's condition implied. They are poor, captives, blind, bruised. The loving, sad eye is already looking on humanity with clear insight and yearning pity. They who are called of God to help men have to take men's sorrows betimes into their own hearts. They who are fit to be welcomed and helped by Jesus must accept and feel the truth of His estimate of their state. Mark the calm consciousness of power to grapple with and overcome all these miseries. He has no temptation to under-estimate the disease, for He is sure that He can cure it. There stands a humble Galilean peasant, and singly fronts a world full of wretchedness, blindness, bondage, and bruises, and asserts that power to remedy all is in Him. Was He right or wrong? If He was right, what and who is He?

What did the people who knew Him so well think of His words? They "bare Him witness." Something in their hearts was stirred by the gracious manner as well as substance of His words, and endorsed His claims and drew the hearers towards Him. That inward witness speaks

still. Will the testimony within be listened to, or stifled? Life and death hang on the answer. The balance wavers for a moment, and then goes the wrong way. A cold jet of criticism is turned on; and when the hearers got to saying, "Is not this Joseph's son?" (which He was not), all was over. We should probably have done the same if we had been there. Let us take heed how we deal with the witness of our own hearts to Jesus; for we, too, are in danger of drowning its voice by noisy prejudices and inclinations.

II. Jesus sees how their thoughts are running, and meets the unspoken demand by a flat negative. The descent from their first impressions is swift and sure. If they have begun with remembering His apparent origin, they will soon get lower down into the chill fog of sarcasm, and a mood half angry that Capernaum should have been more favoured than they, and half sceptical whether these wonders, which had made such a noise, had ever been done at all.

Sadly Jesus sees His hopes of these men, so dear by early association, fading, and comes to experience, what He had so often to feel, that ordinary people cannot believe in the extraordinary gifts of a neighbour of their own. "Far-away birds have fine feathers." It is difficult to pierce through the visible similarities of the outward life of the prophet and his next-door neighbour, and to recognise greatness which we have seen constantly. It has been the way of the blind world in all ages, and will be till the end. Jesus is the eminent example; and this is the first of the long series of rejections by those who knew Him least, just because they knew Him so well. "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." Thus early in His career did He cast His own fate into that sad saying, which described it all, "No prophet is accepted in his own country." Does it not sound here like the first utterance of a new and painful conviction just forced on Him?

But note how immediately He passes to the thought of His world-wide mission. The handful of Nazarenes become representative of the nation, and their rejection of Him the occasion of the blessings passing to the heathen. If Jesus had not long been familiar with this thought, it could not have come to Him now so quickly or so clearly, nor been announced so decisively and calmly. Obviously He entered on His ministry with the consciousness that His kingdom was as wide as humanity, and His blessings meant for all the lonely and diseased everywhere. Note, too, how His mind is saturated with Scripture. It was His weapon in His desert conflict; it is His unanswerable demonstration that Israel's prophets carry blessings to Gentiles. Observe the boldness of selecting His examples from the hereditary enemies of Israel. Sidon and Damascus were objects of bitter hatred in old days, and yet they received the gifts. The sting of the examples lay not only in the inclusion of the alien, but in the exclusion of the Jew,—and that is insisted on emphatically. Clearly our Lord has the whole future course of the gospel before Him, and it is significant of Luke's point of view that He should be the only one to tell us how, thus early in His career, Jesus stretched the arms of His pitying help to embrace the world.

No wonder that they "were filled with wrath." Their interest had quickly cooled. The carping question and the craving for miracle had effectually damped the incipient admiration. No doubt the words of prophecy had stirred some hopes of mere political freedom in these fierce Galileans, in whose remoter province opposition to Rome smouldered in every corner, ready to break into a blaze with little fanning, and, if He had preached revolt, He might have beat up a following. But this declaration that the outside heathen were to have a share in the healing, sight, and liberty which He proclaimed extinguished all

the dreams of a political Messiah; and that helped to make the Nazarenes the angrier. How true to the passionate Eastern nature is the sudden burst of wrath! They "rose up," interrupting the synagogue service, and, in the whirlwind of their fury, drag Him to some cliff, high enough to kill any one thrown over it. What an end to all the early years and to the possibilities which lay before the Nazarenes!

Let us learn how little the mere familiarity with Christ in the flesh availed to open men's eyes to His beauty, and let us beware lest a similar familiarity with the letter of the record of His life may equally blind us to our need of Him and His Divine authority over us, and Divine power to help and heal us. Let us take heed that we yield to and follow out the stirrings of conviction in our inmost hearts; and remember, for warning against dealing lightly with these, that the same people who one half-hour bare witness to Jesus, and wondered at His gracious words, were ready to fling Him over the rock the next, and, so far as we know, lost Him for ever when He passed through their midst and went His way. That way led Him out from the little village of His birth into the wide world. It leads Him to each heart that is sad and sore, and brings Him to our doors with hands pierced, and laden with blessings.

LESSON X.

A Sabbath in Capernaum.

ST. LUKE iv. 33-44.

33. "And in the synagogue there was a man, which had a spirit of an unclean devil, and cried out with a loud voice,

34. Saying, Let us alone: what have we to do with Thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art Thou come to destroy us? I know Thee who Thou art; the Holy One of God.

35. And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him. And when the devil had thrown him in the midst, he came out of him, and hurt him not.

36. And they were all amazed, and spake among themselves, saying, What a word is this! for with authority and power He commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out.

37. And the fame of Him went out into every place of the country round about.

38. And He arose out of the synagogue, and entered into Simon's house. And Simon's wife's mother was taken with a great fever; and they besought Him for her.

39. And He stood over her, and rebuked the fever; and it left her: and immediately she arose and ministered unto them.

40. Now when the sun was setting, all they that had any sick with divers diseases brought them unto Him; and He laid His hands on every one of them, and healed them.

41. And devils also came out of many, crying out, and saying, Thou art Christ the Son of God. And He rebuking them suffered them not to speak: for they knew that He was Christ.

42. And when it was day, He departed and went into a desert place: and the people sought Him, and came unto Him, and stayed Him, that He should not depart from them.

43. And He said unto them, I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent.

44. And He preached in the synagogues of Galilee."

THERE are seven references to Christ's preaching in the synagogues in this chapter, and only two in the rest of this Gospel. Probably our Lord somewhat changed

His method, and Luke, as the evangelist of the Gospel for Gentile as well as Jew, emphasises the change, as foreshadowing and warranting the similar procedure in Paul's preaching. This lesson takes us down from the synagogue at Nazareth, among its hills, to that at Capernaum, on the lakeside, where Jesus was already known as a worker of miracles. The two Sabbaths are in sharp contrast. The issue of the one is a tumult of fury and hate; that of the other, a crowd of suppliants and an eager desire to keep Him with them. The story is in four paragraphs, each showing a new phase of Christ's power and pity.

I. Verses 33-37 present Christ as the Lord of that dark world of evil. The hushed silence of the synagogue, listening to His gentle voice, was suddenly broken by shrieks of rage and fear, coming from a man who had been sitting quietly among the others. Possibly his condition had not been suspected until Christ's presence roused his dreadful tyrant. The man's voice is at the demon's service, and not only Jesus recognises what speaks through the wretched victim. We take for granted the reality of demoniacal possession, as certified, for all who believe Jesus, by His words and acts in reference to it, as well as forced on us by the phenomena themselves, which are clearly distinguishable from disease, madness, or sin. The modern aversion to the supernatural is quite as much an unreasonable prejudice as any old woman's belief in witchcraft; and Professor Huxley, making clumsy fun of the "pigs at Gadara," is holding opinions in the same sublime indifference to evidence of facts as the most superstitious object of his narrow-visioned scorn.

Napoleon called "impossible" a "beast of word." So it is in practical life,—and no less so when glibly used to discredit well-attested facts. We neither aspire to the omniscience, which pronounces that there can be no possession

by evil spirits, nor venture to brush aside the testimony of the Gospels and the words of Christ, in order to make out such a contention.

Note the rage and terror of the demon. The presence of purity is a sharp pain to impurity, and an evil spirit is stirred to its depths when in contact with Jesus. Monstrous growths that love the dark shrivel and die in sunshine. The same presence which is joy to some may be a very hell to others. We may approach even here that state of feeling which broke out in these shrieks of malignity, hatred, and dread. It is an awful thing when the only relief is to get away from Jesus, and when the clearest recognition of His holiness only makes us the more eager to disclaim any connection with Him. That is the hell of hells. In its completeness, it makes the anguish of the demon; in its rudiments, it is the misery of some men.

Observe, too, the unclean spirit's knowledge, not only of the birthplace and name, but of the character and Divine relationship of Jesus. That is one of the features of demoniacal possession which distinguish it from disease or insanity, and is quite incapable of explanation on any other ground. It gives a glimpse into a dim region, and suggests that the counsels of heaven, as effected on earth, are keenly watched and understood by eyes whose gleam is unsoftened by any touch of pity or submission. It is most natural, if there are such spirits, that they should know Jesus while men knew Him not, and that their hatred should keep pace with their knowledge, even while by the knowledge the hatred was seen to be vain.

Observe Christ's tone of authority and sternness. He had pity for men, who were capable of redemption; but His words and demeanour to the spirits are always severe. He accepts the most imperfect recognition from men, and often seems as if labouring to evoke it; but He silences the

spirits' clear recognition. The confession which is "unto salvation" comes from a heart that loves, not merely from a head that perceives; and Jesus accepts nothing else. He will not have His name soiled by such lips.

Note, still further, Christ's absolute control of the demon. His bare word is sovereign, and secures outward obedience, though from an unsubdued and disobedient will. He cannot make the foul creature love, but He can make him act. Surely Omnipotence speaks, if demons hear and obey. Their king had been conquered, and they knew their master. The strong man had been bound, and this is the spoiling of his house. The question of the wondering worshippers in the synagogue goes to the root of the matter, when they ask what they must think of the whole message of One whose word gives law to the unclean spirits; for the command to them is a revelation to us, and we learn His Godhead by the power of His simple word, which is but the forth-putting of His will.

We cannot but notice the lurid light thrown by the existence of such spirits on the possibility of undying and responsible beings reaching, by continued alienation of heart and will from God, a stage in which they are beyond the capacity of improvement, and outside the sweep of Christ's pity.

II. Verses 38 and 39 show us Christ in the gentleness of His healing power, and the immediate service of gratitude to Him. The scene in the synagogue manifested "authority and power," and was prompted by abhorrence of the demon even more than by pity for his victim; but now the Lord's tenderness shines unmingled with sternness. Mark gives details of this cure, which, no doubt, came from Peter,—such as his joint ownership of the house with his brother, the names of the companions of Jesus, and the infinitely tender action of taking the sick woman by the hand and helping her to rise. But Luke, the physician, is more precise in his

description of the case: "holden by a great fever." He traces the cure to the word of rebuke, which, no doubt, accompanied the clasp of the hand.

Here again Christ puts forth Divine power in producing effects in the material sphere by His naked word. "He spake, and it was done." That truly Divine prerogative was put forth at the bidding of His own pity, and that pity which wielded Omnipotence was kindled by the beseechings of sorrowing hearts. Is not this miracle, which shines so lustrously by the side of that terrible scene with the demon, a picture in one case, and that the sickness of one poor and probably aged woman, of the great truth that heartens all our appeals to Him? He who moves the forces of Deity still from His throne lets us move His heart by our cry.

Luke is especially struck with one feature in the case,—the immediate return of ordinary strength. The woman is lying, the one minute, pinned down and helpless with "great fever," and the next is bustling about her domestic duties. No wonder that a physician should think so abnormal a case worthy of note. When Christ heals, He heals thoroughly, and gives strength as well as healing. What could a woman, with no house of her own, and probably a poor dependant on her son-in-law, do for her healer? Not much. But she did what she could, and that without delay. The natural impulse of gratitude is to give its best, and the proper use of healing and new strength is to minister to Him. Such a guest made humble household cares worship; and all our poor powers or tasks, consecrated to His praise and become the offerings of grateful hearts, are lifted into greatness and dignity. He did not despise the modest fare hastily dressed for Him; and He still delights in our gifts, though the cattle on a thousand hills are His. "I will sup with him," says He, and therein promises to become, as it were, a guest at our humble tables.

III. Verses 40 and 41 show us the all-sufficiency of Christ's pity and power. The synagogue worship would be in the early morning, and the healing of the woman immediately after, and the meal she prepared the midday repast. The news had time to spread; and, as soon as the sinking sun relaxed the sabbatical restrictions, a motley crowd came flocking round the house, carrying all the sick that could be lifted, all eager to share in His healing. The same kind of thing may be seen yet round many a European or American traveller's tent. It did not argue real faith in Him, but it was genuine sense of need, and expectation of blessing from His hand; and the measure of faith was the measure of blessing. They got what they believed He could give. If their faith had been larger, its answers would have been greater.

But men are quite sure that they want to be well when they are ill, and bodily healing will be sought with far more earnestness and trouble than soul-healing. Crowds came to Jesus as physician who never cared to come to Him as Redeemer. Offer men the smaller gifts, and they will run over one another in their scramble for them; but offer them the highest, and they will scarcely hold out a languid hand to take them.

But the point made prominent by Luke is the inexhaustible fulness of pity and power, which met and satisfied all the petitioners. The misery spoke to Christ's heart; and so, as the level rays of the setting sun cast his lengthening shadow among the sad groups, He moved amidst them, and with gentle touch healed them all. To-day, as then, the fountain of His pity and healing power is full, after thousands have drawn from it, and no crowd of suppliants bars our way to His heart or His hands. He has "enough for all, enough for each, enough for evermore."

The reference to demoniacs adds nothing to the particulars

in the earlier verses except the evidence it gives of the frequency of possession then.

IV. Verses 42-44 show us Jesus seeking seclusion, but willingly sacrificing it at men's call. He withdraws in early morning, not because His store of power was exhausted, or His pity had tired, but to renew His communion with the Father. He needed solitude and silence, and we need it still more. No work worth doing will ever be done for Him unless we are familiar with some quiet place, where we and God alone together can hold converse, and new strength be poured into our hearts. Our Lord is here our pattern, also, of willing leaving the place of communion when duty calls and men implore. We must not stay on the Mount of Transfiguration when demoniac boys are writhing on the plain below, and heart-broken fathers wearying for our coming. A great solemn "must" ruled His life, as it should do ours, and the fulfilment of that for which He "was sent" ever was His aim, rather than even the blessedness of solitary communion or the repose of the silent hour of prayer.

LESSON XI.

A Parable in a Miracle.

ST. LUKE v. 1-11.

1. "And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon Him to hear the word of God, He stood by the lake of Gennesaret,

2. And saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets.

3. And He entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And He sat down, and taught the people out of the ship.

4. Now when He had left speaking, He said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught.

5. And Simon answering said unto Him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at Thy word I will let down the net.

6. And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake.

7. And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink.

8. When Simon Peter saw it he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.

9. For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken:

10. And so was also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men.

11. And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed Him."

LUKE has apparently antedated the scene in the synagogue at Capernaum, in order to put it by the side of the other synagogue incident at Nazareth. The other synoptic Gospels seem to adhere to the chronological order in putting the call of the four disciples before the preaching at

Capernaum. But throughout this part of his Gospel, Luke's notes of time are not precise, except as regards that Sabbath at Capernaum ; and the order of narration is not necessarily that of occurrence, even in the author's mind. This lesson has three stages: the sermon from the fishing-boat, the draught of fishes, and the call of Simon.

I. The narrative is vivid and picturesque. We can fancy the little crowd on the beach in the fresh morning; their unmannerly jostling ; the singular inattention of Simon and the others; the wet, slimy boats, drawn up, in token that fishing was done for the day ; the crews busy cleaning the nets ; and, stretching from the strip of busy beach, the glittering waters, shining in the early sun as it rose over the eastern hills. Fishermen are not in a sweet humour after an unsuccessful night ; and to ask the boat to be launched again, and the nets to be left, dirty, to harden in the sun, was to ask a good deal. The ready compliance implies previous acquaintance, and John's Gospel explains why it was given. Though they had not lifted their heads from washing the nets to listen to Jesus, they were all His disciples ; but they had not been summoned to forsake their callings, and Jesus had been going about preaching alone. They did not know how far He wished them to swell the crowd of listeners, and so they went on with their work. The patient doing of common duties is as true a service as any other. Who looked likest disciples, the eager listeners or the knot of fishers ?

But that light-minded crowd shows us that open ears and shut hearts often go together, and the true sign of discipleship was dropping the nets and shoving off just because He wished it. Let us learn to stick to our small secular duties till Jesus asks other service, and then to drop them immediately and cheerily, like these men. What a pulpit for such a preacher the rough, untidy fishing-boat was! How

willingly He shared the lowly lot of His friends, and how little He cared for comfort, or what people call dignity! The gospel for all men, poor as well as rich, was fitly preached from a fishing-boat; and its power to exalt all secular work into divine and priestly service was plain from the very place of its utterance.

II. The boat lay close in shore; for certainly Christ's tones were quiet. The order to go out into deeper water, and let down the nets there, was contrary to all rules of the craft. Night was the time, and near the shore the spot, for catching fish. It was unwelcome work to go off again with half-washed nets. Peter might well have said that he knew more about fishing than that; that it was useless to try it in the bright sunshine; that the men were tired; that the nets were not ready, and so on. Notice that "put out" is in the singular, and "let down" in the plural, and that Peter says "I will let down." He was in command, and had his crew —probably Andrew and hired servants—aboard. His words require us to suppose previous knowledge of Jesus, not only by their entire submission, but by the use of "Master." Luke never uses "Rabbi," but this word frequently. It appears to be his translation of "Rabbi," for the benefit of Theophilus and other Gentile readers.

"At thy word I will" is the very essence of obedience. Never mind though use and wont say "Folly"; never mind how vain the night's work has been, nor how weary the arms with rowing and hauling; if Jesus says, Down with the nets, then down they should go, and he who truly calls Him Master will not stop to argue or to remonstrate, but take that word as enough, and have them over the side in a moment. Swiftness is part of obedience. The reward is as swift. The load threatens to break the nets, which would be gripped by the upper edge to lift in, and be so heavy as to give way at the top. The other boat is, probably, ashore still, and, as

Simon's was out some way, signs were better than shouts to summon help. We can fancy how quickly James and John got their boat out, and how vigorously they pulled to their friends. The contents of the nets are tumbled into both boats, and load them to the gunwale, so that they are low in the water. We need not suppose that they were in danger of going down, but only that they were depressed.

This miracle is remarkable, in that it was not done in answer to any cry of distress, and in that it had not for its purpose the supply of any sore need. Its value is didactic and symbolical. In the former aspect it reveals Jesus as Lord of nature and as fulfilling the ancient psalm, which ascribes to man, as God meant him to be, dominion over "the fish of the sea." The ideal man is king on earth, and the Gospel which is eminently the Gospel of the "Son of man" dwells lovingly on the incident which shows how the original and forfeited glory of humanity was restored in Jesus. "We see not yet all things put under" man, but "we see Jesus." This teaching is equally clear, whether we regard the point of the miracle as being our Lord's supernatural knowledge of the place of these passers "through the paths of the seas," or as His sovereign power bringing them to the nets.

It teaches, too, His care for His followers' material needs, and prophesies the blessing which crowns obedient work in secular callings. It may be regarded as a practical lesson for our daily work. There will often be apparent failure, and nights of toil without result. But we are not to cease tugging at the oar, or casting the net, though it comes up empty. True, we are to learn from failure, and to change the fishing-ground, or the nets, if it be repeated and unbroken. Perseverance is not to be pushed to obstinacy; but if we are sure of what is duty, we are to stick to it, come failure or success.

Then, too, we learn the need for prompt, unhesitating obedience to every command of Christ's, however it may break in on our rest or contradict our notions. If all our common duties have this motto written on them, "At Thy word," the distasteful will become pleasant and the fatiguing light, and success and failure will be wisely alternated by Him as may be best for us; and whatever the outward issues of our work, its effects on ourselves will be to bring us nearer to Him, and, though our nets may often be empty, our hearts will be full of perfect peace. Work done in simple obedience to Christ needs no external success in order to be blessed, and, whatever comes of it, we shall "self-enfold its large results." But the miracle is symbolical as well as didactic. It is a parable, and that aspect comes out most plainly in the third stage, to which we now turn.

III. Peter's impetuous exclamation gave a partly erroneous expression to a wholly right impression, which was the very one that Jesus desired to make. The miracle had heightened his conceptions of the worker, for "Lord" is a loftier form of address than "Master." It had also flashed upon him a sudden consciousness of his own sinfulness, which was wholly wholesome.

It is well when great mercies reveal the Giver more clearly, and when the glimpse of the gracious Giver bows us with the sense of our own unworthiness. That sense makes us worthy to be charged with His messages to men. That fear sets us free from the cause of fear. To know ourselves sinful, and Christ as Lord, is the beginning of deliverance from sin, and of fitness for apostleship. So far, Peter was quite right in his swift reasoning, with its many suppressed links, which binds the conclusion of his sinfulness to the premise of the miracle. But he was sadly wrong in his "Depart from me." The disease is a reason for the coming, not for the going, of the healer. He would have understood

himself and his Lord better if he had cried, Never leave me, for I am sinful. He did understand both better on that other morning, when this miracle was repeated, and he, the denier but the penitent, flung himself into the water to get close to his Master. A partial sense of sin, and surface knowledge of Jesus, drive from Him; a deeper understanding of Him and ourselves drives to Him, just as a child that feels its transgression against a mother's love will run to hide its face on her bosom.

Christ knows what Peter really means by his foolish cry. What he wants to get rid of is, not Jesus, but the sin that separates him from Jesus. He has wrongly read his own want; but Christ reads it rightly, and answers the spirit of it by binding him closer to Himself. "Go away," said Peter. "Come to Me henceforth permanently, and leave all else to be with Me," replied Jesus. The answer sufficiently translates the true wish that lay beneath the wild words. Christ knows our hearts better than we do, and often reads our wishes more truly than we put them into utterance.

The call of Peter to a new life of closer association and service, is the only part of this narrative given by the other evangelists. Their omission of the miracle need not surprise us. If they knew of it, which is doubtful, they may have regarded the call of the disciples as the most important part of the incident; for they are something much better than miracle-mongers. All the evangelists record the analogy drawn between the former and the new occupation. Luke's "From henceforth" indicates the change in Peter's calling and relation to Jesus. The moment was an epoch, making a revolution in his life. Our sight of our own sinfulness, and of His holiness, ever makes a turning-point. Well for us if "henceforth" we are nearer Him, and lifted above our old selves.

The fisherman's trade is the symbol of evangelistic activity, and the points of resemblance are very obvious. But there is one emphatic difference, brought into prominence by the word for "catch," which literally means "take alive." This fishing is to draw men out of the waters of sin and death; not to destroy, but to save; to make alive, not to kill. The emblem suggests that the history of that night's fishing is repeated in the higher work of preaching the gospel. There is need for the same patient toil, the same persistent bearing up against discouragement. There will come the same apparent want of success, and there should ever sound in the servant's ears the Master's command to launch out into the deep,—to push boldly into untried ground and to ply his task, undaunted by discouragements and unwearied by the long night of toil.

The preparation for such service is the sense of personal guilt and demerit, and the reception into an humble heart of Christ's calming assurance of His love. The conditions of success are diligence, obedience, hope. The preliminary is to leave all and follow Him. We may have only an old boat and a bundle of torn nets, or we may have much; but, whatever it be, we have to give it up, and he who surrenders an "all" which is little, is one in motive, and will be one in reward, with him who gives up an all which is much.

LESSON XII.

Christ's Claim to Forgive, and its Attestations.

St. Luke v. 17-26.

17. "And it came to pass on a certain day, as He was teaching, that there were Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by, which were come out of every town of Galilee, and Judæa, and Jerusalem: and the power of the Lord was present to heal them.

18. And, behold, men brought in a bed a man which was taken with a palsy: and they sought means to bring him in, and to lay him before Him.

19. And when they could not find by what way they might bring him in because of the multitude, they went upon the housetop, and let him down through the tiling with his couch into the midst before Jesus.

20. And when He saw their faith, He said unto him, Man, thy sins are forgiven thee.

21. And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, Who is this which speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?

22. But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, He answering said unto them, What reason ye in your hearts?

23. Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk?

24. But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins, (He said unto the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house.

25. And immediately he rose up before them, and took up that whereon he lay, and departed to his own house, glorifying God.

26. And they were all amazed, and they glorified God, and were filled with fear, saying, We have seen strange things to day."

ONLY Luke mentions the presence of Pharisees and doctors from Judæa and Jerusalem. John explains their having come all the way to Capernaum by his account of our Lord's early visit to Jerusalem, and such conversations as we find in his fifth chapter. The ecclesiastical

authorities suspected this new teacher, and sent a deputation with keen noses for heresy to find out what was going on so far away from the fountain of orthodoxy. We can see them, sitting in a little knot, somewhat apart, and watching jealously for the smallest trace of unsoundness. The enthusiastic crowd was not repressed by their presence, but felt that something else, even "the power of the Lord," was there too. What a contrast the cold hostility of the "superior people" affords with the eagerness of the four bearers, as they make their way by some outside stair, or across the neighbouring roofs, and pull up the slight roofing, to lower their helpless friend down the short distance to the open courtyard.

The most important part of this story is, not the miracle, but the forgiveness preceding it, and the teaching as to the relation between the invisible and perpetual work of Christ on men's consciences and His visible work on their outward condition.

I. The first thought suggested is that our deepest need is forgiveness. Christ's answer to the faith which He discerned here seems irrelevant and beside the mark. "Man, thy sins are forgiven thee," was far away from the wishes of the bearers; but it was the shortest road to their accomplishment, and goes straight to the heart of the case. The disease was probably the result of "a sin of flesh avenged in kind." Probably, too, the sick man felt that, whatever his friends wanted for him, what he wanted most for himself was pardon.

Is not forgiveness our prime need? Is not a man's relation to God the most important thing? If that be wrong, will not everything be wrong? and if that be right, will anything be really wrong? Beneath all surface diversities of character, culture, position, and the like, is the fact, and, in some measure, the consciousness, that we have

sinned. This is the fontal source of all sorrow; for the most of our misery comes either from our own or others' wrong-doing, and the rest is needful because of sin, in order to discipline and purify. Hence the profound wisdom of Christ and of His gospel in not trifling with the surface, but going right to the centre.

The wise physician pays little heed to secondary symptoms, but grapples with the disease. Christ makes the tree good, and trusts the good tree to make, as it will, good fruit. The first thing to do, in order to heal men's misery, is to make them pure, and the first step towards that is to assure them of Divine forgiveness. All other attempts to deliver men will fail if this deepest wound is not dealt with first. Those who pin their hopes to them alone have but superficially diagnosed the disease, and are sadly wrong about the remedy. There is much value in these other forms of work, and much noble enthusiasm in many earnest workers among the squalid vice of our great cities; but we must go much deeper than intellectual, or æsthetic, or economical, or political amendments, before we touch the real reason why life is so full of wretchedness. We shall only effectually cure that—and we shall then certainly do it—when we begin where it begins, and deal first with sin. He is the true "Saviour of society" who can say, "Thy sins are forgiven thee." And when that is heard and believed, then new energy will stream into palsied limbs, and the lame man leap as an hart.

II. The next thought here is that forgiveness is an exclusively Divine act. These cold critics sitting by had no care for the dewy pity in Christ's looks, nor for the spark of hope beginning to flicker in the sick man's dim eyes; but they fasten promptly on the "blasphemy." They are not on their own ground, and dare not speak out before the excited crowd who are proud of their Galilean prophet, and

so they mutter to themselves their caustic comments. But yet they were quite right. Forgiveness is God's prerogative. "Sin" has to do with God only; vice has to do with morality; crime has to do with human law; and the same act may be regarded in either of these three aspects.

When regarded as sin, only He against whom it has been committed can forgive it. Forgiveness is mainly that the love of the offended shall flow to the offender, notwithstanding the offence. It is love rising above the dam which we have flung across its course, and pouring into our hearts. Our own parental forgiveness is in some feeble way analogous to God's, and shows us that the essence of it is not the suspension of penalty, which may or may not be the case, but the unchecked and unembittered gift of God's love to the sinner. This is what we need, and we need to have a definite Divine declaration of it. Any man who has ever been down into the depths of his own heart, and seen the ugly things that coil there, knows that a vague trust in the possible mercy of a silent God is not enough. We need the King's sign manual on the pardon to make it valid, and, unless we can somehow come to close grips with God, and hear, with infallible certitude, as from His own lips, the assurance of forgiveness, we have not enough for our needs.

III. Jesus claims and exercises the Divine prerogative of forgiveness. He admits the premises of the cavillers. If He was only a man, like us, standing in the same relation to the Divine forgiveness that other prophets and saints have occupied, why, in the name of common sense, to say nothing of veracity, did He not turn round to the group of doctors, and say that He was only declaring God's forgiveness? He was bound by all the obligations of a religious teacher and a devout man, to disclaim, as we should have done under similar circumstances, the misunderstanding of His words, and to have said, "No, I am not speaking blasphemies. I

know that God only can forgive, and I am but telling our poor brother here that God does forgive him." But that is not His answer at all. He recognises their premises, and then asserts that He, the Son of man, has the power which they and He agree in acknowledging to belong to God only. "No man can forgive sins, but God only. I forgive sins. Whom think ye that I, the Son of man, am?" Surely we are brought here face to face with a very sharp alternative.

Either the Pharisees were quite right, and Jesus, the meek, the humble, the pattern of all lowly gentleness, the religious Genius whom eighteen centuries confess that they have not exhausted, was an audacious blasphemer, or He was God manifest in the flesh. The whole context forbids us to take these words, "Thy sins are forgiven thee," as anything less than Divine love wiping out the man's transgressions; and if Jesus Christ said them, no hypothesis can save His character for the undiminished reverence of the world but that which sees in Him God revealed in manhood, the Son of man, who is the Son of God, the Judge of men, and their Pardoner.

IV. Jesus Christ here brings visible facts into the witness-box as the attesters of His invisible power. All the evangelists record the remarkable form of His words, which address the Pharisees, and then pass over, in the same sentence, to speak the sovereign command to the paralytic. They all give the parenthesis explanatory of the transition. They all emphasise the fact that the objections of the Pharisees were not spoken aloud, but discerned by Jesus, in the exercise of supernatural power. He who could read men's secret thoughts could forgive men's sins. It is easier to say "Thy sins are forgiven thee," than to say "Arise, and take up thy couch," because the accomplishment of the one saying can be verified, and that of the other cannot. The sentences are equally easy to pronounce; the fulfilments of

them are equally impossible for a man to bring about; but the difference between them is that the one can be checked, and the other cannot. He will do the visible impossibility, and leave them to judge whether He can do the invisible one or not.

Of course, the miracle was a witness to His right to assume the Divine prerogative, and to the efficacy of His announcement of forgiveness, only if He did it (as He assumed to give pardon) by virtue of His being in an altogether unique way the wielder of Divine power. If He did the one as a mere minister and recipient of that power, as a Moses or an Elijah, He must do the other in the same way. But the very stamp on all His miracles is that they are His, in a fashion which is perfectly unique. True, "the Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works;" but that dwelling of the Father in Him was unexampled, and presupposed His own divinity.

Note, then, that our Lord here teaches us the power of His miracles as evidences of His Deity, and also sets lucidly forth the relative importance of the attesting miracle, and of the inward forgiveness which it attests. The miracle is subordinate to the higher and—blessed be His name!—the permanent work of bringing pardon and peace to sinners.

The principle involved is capable of application beyond the region of miracles. The subsidiary, visible effects of the gospel do constitute very strong evidences of the reality of Christ's claims to exercise the invisible power of pardon. Men reclaimed, passions tamed, homes made, instead of pandemoniums, Bethels, houses of God, are proofs that the forgiveness which He gives is no mere delusion. If the desert should suddenly "blossom as the rose," everybody would know that water had come somehow, even though it was unseen as it percolated through the sand.

It is a valid argument for much of this day's doubt: "If

you seek the witnesses of His claims, look around." His own answer to the question "Art thou He that should come?" is to the point still: "Go and tell John the things that ye see and hear: the dead are raised, the deaf hear." Faculties dormant are roused, and in a thousand ways the swift spirit of life flows from Him, and vitalises the dead masses of humanity. This rod has budded, at any rate. Let the critics and disbelievers do the same with their enchantments.

It is waste time to try and purify the river twenty miles from its source. The cleansing power must be applied at the fountain head. Our misery can never be healed till we go to the pardoning Christ, and hear from His own sweet and infallible lips the assurance that shall breathe new power through all our palsied limbs. When He says, "Man, thy sins are forgiven thee," limitations, sorrows, diseases, will pass away, and forgiveness will bear fruit in joy and power, in holiness, health, and peace.

LESSON XIII.

The Law of Love.

St. Luke vi. 27-38.

27. "But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you,

28. Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you.

29. And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloke forbid not to take thy coat also.

30. Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again.

31. And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.

32. For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them.

33. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same.

34. And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again.

35. But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for He is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil.

36. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.

37. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven:

38. Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again."

THE obvious difference between Luke and Matthew in their versions of the Sermon on the Mount is the omission by the former of all that bears on the contrast between the Mosaic and the Christian law. In accordance

with the Gentile tone of this Gospel, only the purely universal aspect of this discourse is here given,—the Beatitudes, our lesson, which is the broad statement of the law of love, and the solemn, closing warning of the results of obedience and its contrary. Verses 27-31 contain the law in its most general form; verses 32-36 sharpen the requirement of disinterestedness, while they lead to the hope of the true reward; verses 37 and 38 point to the power of disinterested love to kindle love and evoke benefits which it does not seek.

I. The Christian law of love is stated in the widest sweep, is followed out in detail, and then is cast again into its most general form in verse 31, which makes our desires the standard of our duties. Thus the details are, as it were, enclosed between two broad statements of principle, and set in that golden ring, "Love your enemies. As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise." These details are twofold: first, the general injunction is carried into deeds, words, and, highest of all, as the noblest proof and exercise of love, into prayer! and, second, the passive side of love is shown as being non-resistance to the three forms of unlovingness, bodily violence, forcible seizure of property, and unreasonable demands. These are but specifications of the law. It, in its two forms at the beginning and end of the section, is the all-important matter. These answer the questions, Whom are Christians to love? and, How are they to show their love?

Love your enemies is a hard saying, which goes dead against the grain of the whole natural man. The world has chorused its praise of the elevation and beauty of the command, but has not thought of keeping it; and no man will ever keep it without much struggle to put down self, and a very constant and deep drinking in of the spirit of Jesus Christ. The impulse of us all is to answer hate with

hate and scorn with scorn. But unless we squeeze every drop of anger and enmity out of our hearts, and are incapable of being provoked to its like by any hate or harm, we have not obeyed our King. It is a terrible commandment, and grips us hard, if we honestly try to live by it. "Either this is not Christ's commandment, or we are not Christians," said some one.

No less searching and shaming is the closing shape of the commandment, which makes our desires for ourselves and our expectations from men the measure of our obligations to them. Whether anything partially like this was taught by rabbis or no, matters very little. Their approximations to it seem to have been negative precepts at the best; and there is all the difference between "Don't do what you would not wish done to you," and "Do what you would like to be done." The crop from the one would be mere abstinence from mischief; that from the other, positive lavishing of good. It is a stroke of Divine wisdom to convert the selfishness which is always thinking of its claims on others into the preacher of the claims of others on us. If these two principles ruled action, the details which they enclose here would follow of themselves. The world admires the precept, but with equal unanimity declares the details impracticable. Commentators have done their best to explain away these "paradoxes." But are they not the necessary result of obedience to the law? and is it not a greater paradox than they? Suppose that we had nothing but love in our hearts to our enemy, would not the active beneficence here enjoined be the instinctive expression of it? We should do him good, bless him, and pray for him. Would not the non-resistance here enjoined be also its expression? It is hard to suppose that perfect love would hit back again. No doubt, the case of professional beggars is not included here, and, no doubt, it may be the kindest

thing to do to beggar and thief, to hinder them. But, if so, it must be as truly the effluence of our love to them, as if we gave what they ask or take. The law is bounded by itself, and by nothing else.

II. Verses 32-36 are closely connected, and bring out still more emphatically the contrast between Christian, disinterested love, and that which passes for love in the world, which at bottom is self-regard. The contrast is pursued in three stages, as regards the inward feeling, and as regards its twofold expression in doing good, and in lending. All these the world does, and looks amiable in doing; but below the fair show lurks the ugly form of sheer selfishness, the opposite of love. Self-sacrifice is the life of love, and that has no right to the name, which covertly seeks its own gratification or advantage, while pretending to be absorbed in another's good. Love then is not the stretching out of eager arms to gather some fair or sweet thing into one's bosom and call it mine, but the stretching out of laden hands, and the giving away of one's self to the beloved. What a piercing shaft that flings into much worldly love! If it is snuffing after rewards of any sort, it is no love. And yet, says Jesus, such love will have, and may rightly animate itself with the hope of, a reward.

The Revised Version's reading in verse 35, "Never despairing," points to the "reward," which is held out in the next words, and bids the Christian lift his eyes to it. The Authorised Version's rendering is quite defensible, and yields a good sense. In either case, the selfish hope of making a good thing of benevolence is contrasted with the reward which love is emboldened to expect. To hope for it, and to let the hope be a subordinate motive in our self-oblivious and self-sacrificing love, does not in the least stain the unselfishness of Christian love, however fantastic moralists may have accused it of doing so. But what is the

reward? Only this, that such loving souls will be God's children, and therefore will grow more and more like their father. The fact and the consciousness of being His children are both increased by walking in love, and that love grows as they grow. The heathen morality says, "Virtue is its own reward." The Christian law of love says, love brings more of God into the loving heart, and He is "Father of Jesus, Love's reward." The crown of our infantile attempts to keep the law will be a fuller likeness to Him who is kind to the unthankful and the evil.

The statement of the reward is also the statement of the law in its sweetest, most stringent shape. We are to love like God, and that because we are His sons. Matthew says "perfect"; Luke says "merciful." Love is perfectness, and if we are "beloved children," and have felt the sweetness of His love, coming to us in and drawing us out of hatred and alienation, we too shall walk in love, and be "imitators of God," nor seek other reward than the fuller possession and the more complete reflection of His paternal love.

III. In the third section (vers. 37, 38) the law of love is presented as operating on our estimates of others, be they enemies or no. In some respects, the disposition enjoined here is hardest of all to the selfishness of nature, and obedience to it the very triumph of love. There cannot but be moral estimates of others, but the "judging" which is here branded as alien to the spirit of love is rather the indulgence of censorious tempers and the tendency to take unfavourable views of our neighbour's character and acts. If we are under the dominion of love, we shall not be in haste to seat ourselves in the judge's chair, and, if forced to it, shall be still slower to condemn. No doubt, it is needful sometimes to see "the mote" in our "brother's eye," and to help him to cast it out. But that clear sight of evil is not the "judging" which Jesus forbids. Better to be

foolishly merciful in judgment of men and their motives than to be mercilessly wise! Cynical criticism does the critic most harm. It is a poor business to be always eager to turn the seamy side of human nature outermost. The garbage-eating animals are not savoury or sweet. Love "believeth all things, hopeth all things," and is happier and nearer the truth than is the disbelief in goodness and delight in discovering evil, which calls itself knowledge of the world. What floods of gossip and pages of newspapers would be suppressed if this were the law of life in America or England! It is easy to get a reputation for talent and smartness and wit, by always playing the part of the devil's advocate. But it is better to trust than to distrust, and, if we show men that we expect good from them, we help them to be good.

That thought is brought out in the retribution here promised. The judgment which we exercise we have to receive. If we apply a harsh standard to others, they will apply it to us, and we cannot wonder. The world is a mirror which, on the whole, gives back the face with which we look at it. The "giving" spoken of here seems to refer, not to outward gifts, but to judgments, whether of condemnation or of absolution. These will come back on our heads, not in any future Divine judgment, which is not in view here, and is precluded by the "shall they give," but in the working out of our relations to men, and from their hands. There are many fields in which that dread law holds good, but in none is the measure more accurately meted to us again than in this matter of our estimates of others. Nobody likes, but everybody dreads, the sharp eyes and tongue of the uncharitable critic; and when the chance is given, how roughly he is handled! A slashing reviewer writes a book; an ill-natured art critic paints a picture. How many old scores are paid off!

All moral qualities, when in exercise, tend to reproduce themselves in others. This is the blessedness of love, and the curse of selfishness, that each begets its own kind; and so, if we are kindly, and, because love has taught us our own weakness and sin, are ready to veil, if possible, and pityingly to heal where we can, our brother's evil, we shall generally find merciful judgment for our own faults. But if we "rejoice in" ferreting out our neighbour's "iniquity," and will hear of no excuses, we must expect the same stern judgment to be applied by him to us, and shall have little pity when we are condemned by our own sentences on others. The inventor of the guillotine had his own head cut off by it, and there was little weeping when it dropped nto the sack.

LESSON XIV.

The Compassionate Lord of Life

St. Luke vii. 11-18.

11. "And it came to pass the day after, that He went to a city called Nain; and many of His disciples went with Him, and much people.

12. Now when He came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her.

13. And when the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not.

14. And He came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still. And He said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise.

15. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And He delivered him to his mother.

16. And there came a fear on all: and they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up among us: and, That God hath visited His people.

17. And this rumour of Him went forth throughout all Judæa, and throughout all the region round about.

18. And the disciples of John shewed him of all these things."

THIS is the only mention of Nain in Scripture. One beam from the all-revealing light falls on it, and for a moment it starts out of the darkness, and then sinks back again. It is a strange fate to be remembered for ever, and that for one thing only. To-day Nain is a wretched huddle of hovels, and the most conspicuous objects are graves. A cemetery still exists a few minutes' walk from the village to the east, and, no doubt, the road to it was the scene of the miracle.

I. Observe the meeting of the two processions. Jesus is coming up to the city, with a considerable crowd following,

and meets the funeral coming out of the gate. Face to face stand the Prince of Life with His attendants and the waiters on death. The latter would be going at a quick pace, according to Eastern custom, the corpse not enclosed in a coffin, but laid on a light bier, the mourners shrilly lamenting, and in their midst the desolate, widowed mother. Her last stay is gone, and her despair is passionate and loud. "Much people" accompanied her, partly, no doubt, from genuine sympathy, partly as a form, partly from love of any excitement and morbid pleasure in attending a funeral. The dead man, dead in his youth, and when most needed, the lonely mother, the sympathising or gossiping crowd,—these show the ravages of death, the sorrow that shadows all human love and every home, and the unavailing, though well-meant, consolation which men can give.

This was what met Jesus at the gate. This is what meets Him entering the world. That procession is going one way, and He and His the other. They come in contact, and His power arrests the march, sends the dead back living, and the mourner glad. Surely that meeting on the rocky road outside the obscure city may stand for a symbol of His whole coming and work. But the fact of Christ's arrival just at the moment of the funeral's exit is significant. It was no unexpected coincidence. Nor are we to suppose that He was led there at the right moment by a providence of which He knew nothing. He came to Nain and came then, as knowing beforehand what would meet Him there. Why this widow should have been chosen out of all the mourners that laid their dead to rest that day, we do not know. The reasons for the distribution of His gifts are generally beyond us. But we must see in this encounter with the funeral procession the foreseen reason for the journey. On this occasion, too, Jesus went that He might "awake him out of sleep," and supernatural knowledge is

as plain in the coincidence of the meeting as Divine power is in the act of resurrection.

II. Note Christ's unasked pity. The sight of the extreme grief of the poor mother, whom He knew to be reduced to utter loneliness, and probably to poverty, by the death of her only bread-winner and object of love, went straight to Christ's heart. Luke, who is our only informant as to this miracle, has special care for all which shows our Lord's true manhood and participation in our natural emotions. Misery appealed to Him, even if it was dumb. His perfect manhood was perfectly compassionate, and was hindered from the freest flow of pity by no selfishness. In that, as in all belonging to the completeness of humanity, He was what we ought to be, and may become, by drinking in His spirit. One great glory of this miracle is its spontaneousness. Neither request nor faith precede it. How should they? Death was a final and inexorable evil, and none of the three recorded raisings from the dead were in answer to prayers or belief in His power. Martha, indeed, put out a timid feeler, which she dared not make more definite, by her "Even now I know that, whatsoever thou shalt ask of God, God will give thee"; but that was only a momentary flicker of wild hope, which died at once, and her ultimate "belief" was an assent to words scarcely understood, and a falling back on His Messiahship, and whatever that might include.

The last thing that could have occurred to that weeping mother was that this Stranger, whom she was too much absorbed to notice, could give her back her son. But if there was no prayer, there was sorrow and there was need; and sorrow which He could soothe and need which He could supply never made their moan in His hearing in vain. Most of His miracles had some measure of faith in some persons concerned as a precedent condition. But that was a condition established for our sakes, not for His. It was

best for men that it should be so. It was not needful for Him. His love and power were tied to no one manner of working, and unasked, untrusted, probably unobserved, He feels the impulse of pity, which is love turned towards misery, and the impulse moves His all-powerful will. He "tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men"; and while ordinarily He is still wont to be found of those that seek Him, He still finds and blesses some who seek Him not.

III. Christ the compassionate immediately becomes the Consoler. "Weep not" is the natural speech of pity, which would fain dry the tears that call it forth. Very beautiful is it that these soothing words are said before the miracle, as if He would not wait even for a moment before seeking to calm the sorrow. But words which are impotent on other lips, and only make tears run faster, are of sovereign power when He speaks them. His consolations are effectual. Nothing is emptier than the usual well-meant attempts to comfort. What is the use of telling me not to weep, when all the cause of my weeping remains? But if we know that He is with us in trouble, and can hear His whisper of comfort, the sharpness of pain is lulled, though the wound remain. He is as near all sad souls to-day as then, and He will one day "wipe away all tears from off all faces." He does not forbid them to flow, for Himself has wept, and He knows that full hearts are relieved and may be purified by them; but He would have His comforts steal into our souls, and submission gradually dry our tears. He comforted the widowed heart by the assurance of His sympathy before He gave her back her dead, and therein He reveals Himself to all as the compassionate, and therefore the Consoler, even of sorrows that will last as long as life. His "weep not" is not rebuke nor a vain attempt to stop the expression without touching the source of grief, but is a specimen of

His continual work, and a prophecy of the time when 'there shall be no more . . . sorrow, nor crying."

IV. To compassion and comforting succeeds the stupendous act of life-giving. It is told with strange simplicity, considering its character. The gentle hand laid on the open bier was not resented as a rude interruption. Christ's look and word to the mother showed His heart, if not His purpose, and so the bearers halt in silent obedience and expectation. What happened then? Nothing more than that Jesus opened His mouth, and spoke two words,—"Young man, arise,"—as if waking him from sleep. And what happened then? The young man "sat up." How bewildered he would be, finding himself there on the bier, in the blazing light, and with this crowd around him! He "began to speak." What were the words that came from his white lips? Some confused exclamations probably, like those of a suddenly awakened man, not knowing where he was or how he came there. The graphic picture, with that very peculiar detail of the youth's speaking, plainly comes from an eye-witness. Like the other cases of resurrection, this one suggests many questions,—was return to life a kindness to the lad? how did the experience during death fit in with that of earth? and others which might be raised, but not answered. As to the first of these, no doubt, this and all the cases are presented as done out of compassion for the mourners; but we cannot suppose that that motive is irreconcilable with regard for the persons raised, and we may be sure that the gain to the mother was not attained by the loss to the son. Probably the restoration of his bodily life was the beginning of his spiritual.

The whole incident may be regarded as a revelation of Christ's power, or as a revelation of death's impotence. Christ stands forth as the Prince and Giver of Life. His word is enough. Wherever that dead man was, he heard

and obeyed. Commentators talk rashly of "echoes of life lingering about the body," and the like, but we need no such unsupported assumptions. The word of Christ is sovereign wherever creatures are, and dead and living can hear it. The ease with which the miracle is done contrasts with the effort of Elijah and Elisha in their analogous acts. The assumption of authority by Christ is of a piece with all His tone. The whole is His proclamation that He is "Lord both of the dead and living," and that His commands penetrate to and rule in the dark chambers where the dead are gathered, wherever in the universe that may be. It is prophetic, too, for it foreshadows the day when they that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God. His word is but the utterance of His will, and it is His will that raised this youth, and will then raise all the dead.

The miracle teaches the impotence of death, which is but His servant, and vanishes at His bidding. It demonstrates the partial operation of death, as affecting, not the person, but only the body. It shows that when a man dies, he is not ended, but that personality, consciousness, and all that makes the man, are wholly unaffected thereby. "He gave him to his mother." Who can paint that re-union? Think of the two going home again, hand in hand, and shutting the door when they got there, to clasp each other in an embrace which she had thought could never be any more. May we not venture to see in Christ's action here some dim forecast of the future, when, amid the joy of heaven, we too may hope to be reunited to our dear ones, lost awhile? Surely He who brought this young man back from the dead to soothe a widow's sorrow, and found joy in giving him back to a mother's arms, will do the like with us, and let lonely and yearning hearts clasp again their beloved. "And so shall we ever be with the Lord."

LESSON XV.

Forgiveness the Cause and Measure of Love.

St. Luke vii. 36-50.

36. "And one of the Pharisees desired Him that He would eat with him. And He went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat.

37. And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment,

38. And stood at His feet behind Him weeping, and began to wash His feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed His feet, and anointed them with the ointment.

39 Now when the Pharisee which had bidden Him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if He were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth Him: for she is a sinner.

40. And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on.

41. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty.

42. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?

43. Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And He said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged.

44. And He turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head.

45. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet.

46. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment.

47. Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.

48. And He said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven.

49. And they that sat at mea with Him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also?

50. And He said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace."

THIS lovely incident has no notes of time or place; the only detail is the name of the ungracious host. The notion that the woman was Mary Magdalene is baseless, and arises from the erroneous supposition that demoniacal possession was always accompanied with moral corruption. The central point of the narrative is in verse 47, and the whole may be looked upon as leading up to and explained by that great saying.

I. We may note the outpouring of love which has grasped forgiveness. The whole context compels us to see in the woman's tears the signs of gratitude for pardon, and not only the weeping of a penitent seeker after pardon. Somewhere she had come in contact with the Lord, and His words or deeds, or perhaps the impression of His personality from His looks, had pierced her turbulent and foul life with the wound which heals. She had been roused from degradation and sensuality, and, more than that, had been calmed by the sweet assurance of forgiveness. Heavy laden, she had found rest. So when she hears that He is in the Pharisee's house, what can she do but hasten thither, and brave the cruel, scornful looks of the respectable people there, to get near Him who has loosed her bonds? She finds no difficulty in making her way to the table, and she cares nothing for the notice which she attracts. Silently she kneels behind Him, with the cruse of ointment in her hand, which had been procured for sinful adornment. She meant to pour it on His feet, which the attitude at table made easy to do; but before she can open it her heart opens, and tears of thankfulness and sweet penitence rain down so abundantly as to wet His feet, inflicting an indignity when she had meant an honour. She has nothing at hand to repair the fault, and so, with a touch, she looses the hair, which it was shameful to let down in public, and, with the ingenuity and abasement of love, makes it a towel. Then,

gaining confidence and carried farther than she had dared to intend, she lays her lips, sinful as they were, on His feet, as if asking pardon for the tears that would come, and only then applies the ointment, her only wealth. This woman that was "a sinner" and Judas are the only two recorded as having touched the Lord with their lips. Love may be bold even while penitent, and Jesus does not withdraw His foot from such a kiss.

II. Note the snarl of self-righteousness which has never been down into the depths. The Pharisee has the usual attributes of his class. But he seems to have had some faint beginnings of recognition of Jesus, and perhaps had asked Him to his house to study Him more closely, and make up his mind about Him. No wonder that Simon was considerably scandalised at such a scene at his table. He was not surprised at the woman's finding her way in, as probably the meal was a semi-public one; but that a person who assumed to be a rabbi, and perhaps a prophet, should allow such familiarities if he knew the notorious character of the woman, was impossible. So he could not be a prophet. How did Simon come to the conclusion that a prophet must needs know hearts and lives? and why did he assume that a prophet must repel a sinner? The former is not obviously true, and the latter is plainly false. But the true Pharisee thinks that the sign of righteousness is gathering up his skirts when near gross sin, and driving the sinner mercilessly back into the filth. "She is a sinner." No, Simon, she was a sinner, but she is a saint, far purer having been washed, than thou art, who art only whitewashed. Sinfulness which is so ignorant of itself as to be self-righteous, is a severer judge of open sinners than is purity. The one condemns, the other pardons; the one neither knows itself nor her whom it condemns, the other knows both, and would fain bless both

III. So we come to the vindication, by forgiving love, of forgiven love. Simon thought that Jesus did not know the woman's notorious character, but he is startled by a proof that his thoughts, at all events, were sun-clear to Christ. The parable of the two debtors has several noteworthy points. It recognises degrees of debt. It classes all sin as debt,—one in kind, however different in amount. It thus admits that Simon and his like are in one aspect not so bad as the poor sinful woman kneeling silent there. It stringently proclaims the entire incapacity of all men to meet the demands of God's law. No matter whether they owe five hundred pence or one-tenth of it, they are equally insolvent. It implies, if it does not directly assert, that the knowledge of bankruptcy on the debtor's part is a condition of getting his discharge. He must sue *in formâ pauperis*. But it proclaims still more clearly the great truth that God's pardon is due solely to God Himself, and is the act of that love which is its own motive, and springs up eternal in God's heart, for no other reason than because He is God.

The question to Simon admits of only one answer, and he answers in a half-indifferent tone. There sounds to my ear just a shade of contempt for the parable and interrogation in his "I suppose," and certainly he was not prepared for the swift and crushing turn given to the conversation. It is like disclosing a masked battery. Notice how, in the following rapid summing up of the contrasts between the conduct of the two, our Lord repeats and repeats Simon's contemptuous "this woman," and how He shows that He had noticed, though not resented, the churlish want of hospitality. The invitation had been from curiosity or something worse, and the host had thought that he paid sufficient honour to this questionable teacher, when he condescended to let Him sit at his table. Jesus marks the dishonour which He receives; and though He says nothing at the

moment, a day comes when He will recount it to those who did it.

Having thus swiftly presented the contrasted behaviour of the woman and of Simon, our Lord, in verse 47, lays down the great truth, to which all has been leading up. Of course, the "for" in the clause "for she loved much" introduces, not the reason, but the sign, or proof, of forgiveness. The double use of "for" in our language has confused many readers as to its meaning here. But clearly the whole context demands that we should interpret it as we do in a sentence like "the woman is in sorrow, for she weeps," not as we do in a sentence like "the woman weeps, for she is in sorrow." In other words, forgiveness is here presented as the cause of love, and love as the sign, because it is the consequence, of a previous forgiveness. That interpretation is needed to bring the words into line with the parable, in which forgiveness precedes and occasions love. It is needed in order to keep the two parts of the verse together; for, if the meaning had been that love procures pardon, the second clause must have been turned round, and read, "but whoso loveth little, to him little is forgiven."

Unmistakably, then, our Lord teaches here that forgiveness comes first to us who have nothing, not even love, to pay with, and that it unlocks the flood-gates of the heart as nothing else will. We are not pardoned because we love, but we love because we are pardoned. We are pardoned because He loves us, and the knowledge of His forgiving love melts our hearts. Jesus seems here to teach us that there must be this experience of forgiveness before there is real and deep love. Certainly the principle involved in these words has been proved true in all the history of Christianity since they were spoken. Forms of Christianity which minimise sin, and have little to say about pardon, have always been, and always will be, cold and stagnant The

one power that sets souls aflame with a holy and self-sacrificing love, is the experience of God's pardoning mercy in Jesus Christ. The measure of our consciousness of forgiven sin will be the measure of our love. We need not ask whether the "little" pardon and love which Jesus credits Simon with, was but a gentle way of saying that he had none. However that may be about him, there are many professing Christians who might find the reason for their coldness in these words.

A slight consciousness of sin will make a slack grasp of pardon, and that will be sure to stunt the growth of love. The width of the opening in the soul at which pardon flows in, is the same as that at which love flows out. So, though gross sin is always loss and harm, it may be the occasion of deeper penitence, and therefore of higher exaltation. We have all sin enough to put us in the class of those who have much forgiven. Well for us if we know that we have! Fifty pence is much, if we have nothing to pay; and, if Christ forgives us all our sin, He forgives us much. The assurance to the woman, "Thy sins are forgiven," was a confirmation of the previously received pardon. Perhaps she needed it, as she stood there, with all the hard Pharisee eyes turned on her. We all need the repeated assurance of pardon, and shall get it when our hearts fail us by reason of sin, if we carry our thank-offerings to the Pardoner's feet.

The guests rightly understood Jesus as claiming the Divine prerogative of pardon. He did so, not only by the authoritative words, which struck them as approaching blasphemy, but by His acceptance of the woman's gratitude, in accepting which He intercepted no love that should rather have been given to God. He is God manifest in the flesh; and he who loves Him for His forgiveness, loves the pardoning God.

The last word to the woman confirms the teaching of the whole incident in reference to the human condition of forgiveness, which it plainly declares to be, not love, but faith. The order is first faith, which has for its under side the consciousness of sin and helplessness, and for its upper side trust in Jesus the sin-bearer. On faith follows pardon, to which we contribute nothing, and have but to receive it through our faith. To pardon received succeeds answering love, gratitude blended with penitence, all the deeper because we know ourselves forgiven. To such love are granted the acceptance of its poor offerings, a vindication against the sarcasms of cold critics, a confirmation of the pardon received already, and a calm peace, in which hence forward to abide and advance.

LESSON XVI.

The Same Seed and the Differing Soils.

St. Luke viii. 4-15.

4. "And when much people were gathered together, and were come to Him out of every city, He spake by a parable:

5. A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the wayside; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it.

6. And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture.

7. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it.

8. And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold. And when He had said these things, He cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

9. And His disciples asked Him, saying, What might this parable be?

10. And He said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand.

11. Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God.

12. Those by the wayside are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.

13. They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away.

14. And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection.

15. But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience."

IN His earlier ministry Jesus seems to have spoken without parables. The disciples' question following this parable, according to Matthew, asks His reason for what

seems to have been a new method. The reason lay in the very crowds that had been drawn to hear; for these were the sign of passing curiosity or momentary excitement, and sifting was required. The parabolic form revealed and concealed, as we shall see, and hence became a test. This first of all the parables discloses our Lord's own thoughts as to the issue of His teaching, and was at once a warning to hearers and an encouragement to His servants in that work of sowing the word, which would soon be theirs.

I. The parable itself needs little elucidation. We may note as a singular variation that, while Matthew speaks of the seed in each case as plural, Luke has uniformly the singular; while, on the other hand, in the interpretation, the converse is true, and Matthew has "he that was sown," while Luke says "those by the wayside," etc. This use of the singular in the parable has the effect of presenting the seed in each case as one, and accounts for Luke's omission of the various degrees of growth in the last case, while the use of the plural in the interpretation brings out the thought that each case represents a class, including many individuals.

Observe the different prepositions describing the contact of seed and soil,—"by," "on," "among," "into." There is an advance in closeness. The first is only alongside the field-path, and never gets deeper; the second gets down as far as the rock over which a thin skin of soil is stretched; the third, however deep it penetrates, finds thorn seeds beside it; and only the last gets fairly down into the ground. Luke has some interesting variations from Matthew. He adds to the description of the seed by the wayside, that it was "trodden underfoot." A path runs along or through the field, and the stream of passengers is not stopped for sowing. A careless tread flattens the seed down, but does not send it in, and there it lies, more visible in the foot-

print, for the keen-eyed, light-winged thieves that are only waiting for the sower's back to be turned.

In the second case, Luke's "rock" describes the kind of ground more clearly than Matthew's "rocky places," which might mean a field full of surface stones, whereas what is intended is an underlying rock-shelf with a mask of earth. He omits reference to the rapid growth of this seed, and concentrates attention, not on its forthwith springing up, but on its quick withering. His version is condensed, omitting mention of the hot sun and the imperfectly developed root. According to him, it withers because of want of "moisture," which implies both of Matthew's reasons, since the root draws moisture from the deep earth. In the third case, he adds the simultaneous springing of the thorns. They had been cut down to clear the ground for the seed, but the soil was full of roots which had not been stubbed up, or of seeds which would germinate as the more precious seed did, and would keep light and air from the young wheat; for "ill weeds grow apace," and they were there first.

This seed has gone farther towards fruitfulness than the others, but the thorns keep the sun from getting at it to ripen the formed fruit. The correct reading in verse 8 (R.V.) gives "into" instead of Matthew's "upon." The ground was "good," as free from the faults of the others. It was soft, deep, and clean. So the seed went farther down, "grew," as Luke says, and fruited. Since his "seed" is but one, he necessarily omits the varying yield, and specifies only the highest, the ideally perfect hundredfold.

Observe, too, that he separates our Lord's solemn call to attention more distinctly from the parable than Matthew does, with the effect of adding weight to the warning. All "have ears to hear," so these words are addressed to all, and remind all classes of hearers of the heavy responsibility which the capacity to receive the truth brings with it

Though we have ears, we shall not hear unless we make an effort to fix our attention and sharpen our powers. There is a hearing which is not hearing.

II. Our Lord's explanation of the reasons for His teaching by parable is given by Luke in abbreviated form. The disciples' question in Matthew raises the subject of the reasons for this mode of teaching, but in Luke is only a request for a key to the parable. Therefore the former subject is here briefly dealt with. Observe that Christ here draws a distinction between the esoteric teaching to His disciples and that to the multitude. Then did He practise "reserve," or had He two sets of doctrines? Yes and no. For why was there a different treatment for the two classes of "you" and "the rest"? Because the one had listened and the other had not. "To him that hath shall be given" is the principle which explains the disciples' privilege, as Matthew tells us. They had learned A, and so had B given them. And why were the rest given only the truth as veiled in a parable? Because they had not with true submission listened to His teaching, as Matthew says in his form of the quotation from Isaiah, which makes the parable the result of the unseeing eye.

Luke, on the other hand, makes it the means adopted to bring about such an eye. Both things are true. The parable veils as well as reveals, and both purposes are contemplated by Jesus. To men who have closed their hearts and minds against His truth, the veil will prove impenetrable; and it is both judgment and mercy that it should be so,—judgment withdrawing despised truth, and mercy in not aggravating their condemnation by its continual shining unveiled before their blind eyes.

They are awful words, and it is vain effort and cruel kindness to try to eliminate from them the stern truth which the gentlest lips that ever spoke has put into them. Let us see

to it that we keep our ears open and our eyes eager to hear and behold all that He has to say and show, for the faithful use of the lesser leads on to the fuller possession of the more, and the reward in His school is deeper lessons.

III. The interpretation of the parable throws a strong light on our Lord's expectations of success from His own ministry, and bids His servants not wonder if their fate in preaching His name be the same as His. We cannot indeed say that three-fourths of the seed is wasted,—for the parable has no statistical purpose,—but clearly there will be many failures. These will occur at all stages of the growth. The hindrances are all of one kind, inasmuch as they are all within the heart in which the seed is sown. But that these are not inevitable hindrances is clear from the subsequent verses which point the moral of the parable as being, "Take heed how ye hear." The beaten path may be ploughed up, the rock may be pulverised, the deep-lodged thorn seeds may be sifted out. If it were not so, the parable were useless.

The different classes of hearers are broadly discriminated and sharply portrayed, and they are portraits as true to-day as when first painted. Who are the wayside hearers? There are crowds of them in all our churches. Their hearts and minds are so flattened hard, by the perpetual tramp, tramp, through them of worldly thoughts, that, while they are sitting before the preacher, they do not hear a word he is saying, or if they hear the noise it never gets farther than their nerves. There is no real reception of the word, but it lies on the top of their minds, and before they have walked down two streets from their church it is all gone; and if you were to ask them what had been said, they would have to think awhile before they could tell.

If seed is lying about bare, there are always plenty of feathered robbers, light thoughts, and the like, to make off

with it. And Jesus would have us believe that there is a power which attaches more importance to that word than these hearers do. The devil knows how much is at stake, and how blessed it could make them, if they do not. So he helps to get rid of the word, and a man who wishes to put it out of his head will find abundant aids.

The rocky hearers have kept the word longer, and come more under its influence. They are the easily moved, emotional people, whose feelings are quickly worked on, because they are shallow, as ripples come faster on a pond than an ocean. Seed that is only sown in the feelings will sprout quickly, and wither as fast. The more easily moved are the emotions, the sooner do you come to an impenetrable shelf of rock in the heart, which the rootlets do not penetrate. As long as all is plain sailing, these are flourishing Christians, but as soon as temptation comes, which comes to all, they fall away. There are always a fringe of such converts round religious revivals. What such need, is a deeper experience, and to bury the seed far down in their being.

The thorny-ground hearers go still farther toward the mark. They have the new life in them; the seed germinates, and reaches considerable advance. Notice Luke's significant phrase, "They go on their way." They return to the busy road of daily life, and in the bustle lose their earnest hold of the word. The hindrances in this class are threefold, but all of one sort, as all belonging to "this life." Cares, for the poor; riches, for the well-to-do; and pleasures, for all,—choke the word. The man has fruit, only it never ripens. Is not that the very condition of thousands of people, who would be very much astonished and indignant if they were told that this parable had a niche for them? They are Christians after the poor pattern so common, and have fruit, but how shrivelled, green, and sour it is!

The good soil is just the opposite of all these. The heart

is honest and good, which welcomes and holds fast the word, and perseveringly brings forth fruit. The gospel does not need men to be "honest and good," in the sense of having moral purity, before it counts them fit for its blessings. The qualifications here laid down may be possessed by the most sinful, and depend, not on moral purity, but on the consciousness of need, the longing for deliverance, and the recognition of Christ as the all-sufficient Redeemer. If we have these, we shall cleave to the word which reveals His grace, and hold it fast, in spite of all outward and inward hindrances, and if we "receive with meekness that engrafted word," and hide it in our hearts, it will make us neither "barren nor unfruitful."

LESSON XVII.

The Sleeping Child Awakened.

St. Luke viii. 41, 42, 49-56.

41. "And, behold, there came a man named Jairus, and he was a ruler of the synagogue: and he fell down at Jesus' feet, and besought Him that He would come into his house:

42. For he had one only daughter, about twelve years of age, and she lay a dying. But as He went the people thronged Him.

49. While He yet spake, there cometh one from the ruler of the synagogue's house, saying to him, Thy daughter is dead; trouble not the Master.

50. But when Jesus heard it, He answered him, saying, Fear not: believe only, and she shall be made whole.

51. And when He came into the house, He suffered no man to go in, save Peter, and James, and John, and the father and mother of the maiden.

52. And all wept, and bewailed her: but He said, Weep not; she is not dead, but sleepeth.

53. And they laughed Him to scorn, knowing that she was dead.

54. And He put them all out, and took her by the hand, and called, saying, Maid, arise.

55. And her spirit came again, and she arose straightway: and He commanded to give her meat.

56. And her parents were astonished: but He charged them that they should tell no man what was done."

SORROW and need make short work of prejudices. Jairus, as a synagogue official, was, probably, not over favourable to Jesus; but he must have known of the cures already done in the synagogue at Capernaum, and so he forgets his doubts and dignity, and flings himself at the feet of the new Teacher, who, whether a heretic or no, may heal his little girl. His "faith" was, probably, merely a belief in Christ's miraculous power; and he was far behind the

heathen centurion, who did not ask Jesus to come, but only to speak. But his agony was sore, his need great, his beseeching plaintive, and Jesus does not stop to put him through a catechism before He responds to his prayer. We are taught to think more loftily of Christ's willingness and power by His swift and exuberant answers to the poorest faith. Jesus has just come from exhausting toils on the other side of the lake; but He asks for no leisure, but goes with the impatient father at once, attended by a gaping crowd of sight-seers.

In all the Gospels, the narrative is cut in two by the incident of the woman with the issue of blood. Jesus had not delayed for His own ease, but He does so for another's blessing. What an eternity the few minutes' pause would appear to Jairus, and how indifferent he would think Jesus to his pressing case! But Divine power is never in a hurry, and Christ can afford to stop, on His way to a death-bed, to help another sufferer; for one's gain is not another's loss in His dispensing of blessing, but He has time and supplies for all. The narrative, after the interruption, may, perhaps, best be studied by taking our Lord's three sayings as our guides.

I. He invites and encourages faith even at the moment when all seems hopeless. Jairus' impatience was justified by the message of the child's death. How bitterly he must have thought, "My poor darling's life-blood was falling, drop by drop, while we were loitering here with this woman. Five minutes sooner, and we might have kept her." Is there not a faint trace of this feeling in the language, "Trouble not the Master"? It almost sounds like assumed unwillingness to give trouble, masking offence at trouble not having been taken; but perhaps it is only the natural speech of hopelessness. At all events, Jairus' "faith," such as it was, is ready to collapse. He could believe that Jesus could

heal, but to bring to life again was too much to expect. It obviously had not occurred to him as possible. How should it?

Whether we suppose that, in order of time, this was the first miracle of raising the dead, as seems probable, or no, Jairus felt, as we all feel, that hope ends when death enters. And at that moment, when the last faint spark of light in the father's darkened heart has been blown out, Christ, for the first time in the story, speaks. His words sound strange and almost meaningless,—"Fear not." What more was there to fear? The last and worst had come. "Only believe." What was there to believe now? "She shall be made whole." "But she is dead, Rabbi, and Thou speakest as if the blow still hung unfallen." Christ encourages to what might well have seemed an impossible faith, and does so by what might well have sounded an inappropriate promise. But there lies hidden, to be found by the believing father, a comfort which was enough for faith to lay hold on, though it might not be put in plain language. Our Lord does not say, in so many words, "she shall be raised up;" for all through the incident He, as it were, ignores death, so that some have tried to make out that the child was only in a trance. But He gives Jairus enough to cheer him, and relight the flame of hope. He ever comes in like fashion to sad hearts with His soothing voice, which itself has music in its tones to calm sorrow and rekindle hope. He never bids us not to be afraid without bidding us believe in Him, and giving faith something to cling to.

It is empty talk to tell a poor man in Jairus' place, or ours, not to be afraid. Why should he not? Only one thing drives out fear and the rational grounds for it, and that is faith. A true faith will accept His assurances even when they seem to imply impossibilities; and many a mourning heart that has heard Jesus speak thus over the dear dead

whom He has not raised, knows how blessedly true it is, that, dying, they have been "made whole," and live a fuller life, to which the sorrowing heart turns with hope fed by the Master's words.

We do not need to discuss why Jesus generally required faith as a condition of His miracles, further than to point out that it was not a uniformly required condition,—as, for instance, in the raising of the young man of Nain,—and that while, no doubt, the presence of an atmosphere of unbelief restrained and hampered Him in putting forth His miraculous power, we had better not dogmatise too confidently on His need for faith on the part of the recipients, but recognise that the requirement was mainly for the sake of their highest good. His whole message to men may almost be summed up in the words, "Fear not, only believe."

II. The next word of our Lord's is that in the house, at the door of the chamber. Possibly nothing more had been said on the way, as the distance would not be great, and Jairus was in no mood to speak. But there was hubbub enough at the house. The noisy demonstrations with which Easterns especially, but not exclusively, delight to affront the majesty of death, and to disturb the sanctity of sorrow, were in full swing. Flute-players and hired mourners and curious neighbours, and all the crowd that comes to buzz round sorrow, were there,—and a yard off, on the other side of a wall, lay the poor child, quiet and deaf to it all. Verse 51 makes a distinction between coming to the house and "entering in" to the death-chamber. The crowd are not allowed to go in there, much as their morbid curiosity would have liked it, and Jesus had to exercise authority to keep them out. But before He goes in with the selected few, He speaks a word to all, forbidding their noisy lamenting, because "she is not dead, but sleepeth." It indicates a wofully prosaic lack of perception, that these Divine words,

which transform the hideous hopelessness of death into calm and brief repose, should have been taken to mean that the child was in a swoon or trance.

The bystanders' unfeeling laugh is proof enough that what men call death had unmistakably taken place. They had seen the last moments, and knew that she was dead, though the critics nowadays know that she could not have been. Plain men will believe the eye-witnesses. What, then, does that saying intend? Jesus is not dealing in sentimental, fine names for the unchanged horror, as we sometimes do; but His change of names follows a change of nature, and if He says, "This is not death, but sleep," He means, first, that the irrevocable is not irrevocable to Him and His, for He comes to awake the sleeper. But the blessing of the wonderful saying stretches beyond that death-bed. He has abolished death, and, while the physical fact remains, the whole character of it changes.

Sleep is not unconsciousness. It suspends the power of affecting, or being affected by, the world of sense, but does no more. We live and think and rejoice in sleep. It has the promise of waking. It brings rest. Therefore our Lord takes the old metaphor, which all nations have used to hide the ugliness of death, and breathes new hope and calming into it. Heathen despair spoke of an eternal sleep; Jesus shows us that if we sleep, we shall do well, and wake at His voice, leaving weariness and life's fever behind us in the empty bed.

III. His last word is the life-giving one in the death-chamber. Silence and secrecy befitted it. He kept out the noisy mob, and, with the parents and the three chief disciples, enters the sacred presence of the dead. Why this small number of witnesses? Possibly for the sake of the child, whose tender years might be disturbed by many curious eyes, but also, apparently, because, for reasons not known

to us, He desired little publicity for the miracle. It is worth notice, as bearing on His conception of the worth of miracles as evidence of His Messiahship, that He takes pains, both by the exclusion of the crowd and by His imperative injunctions afterwards, to prevent this mighty instance of His power from being known. How simply and easily the stupendous deed is done! One touch of His hand, two words, the very syllables of which Mark gives, and "her spirit returned." Where had it been? How did it hear without ears, and feel without a hand? What is *coming* and *going* to a spirit freed from body? Questions come thick, but answers there are none. Only this we are sure of, by such an event,—that the dead live, that consciousness is not so bound up with corporeity as that the death of the body affects the conscious being of "the spirit," and that, wherever or in whatever state the dead may be, there the will of Christ reaches them and has power. He is the Lord, both of the dead and the living, and "His word runneth very swiftly" over the gulf between the mortals who live here and the dead who live anywhere. They sleep lightly, and are easily waked by His touch. Their sleep, while it lasts, is sweet, restful, conscious, if they sleep in Jesus. As for the weary body, it slumbers; and as for the spirit, it may be said to sleep, if by that we understand the cessation of toil, the end of connection with the outer world, the tranquillity of deep repose; but, in another aspect, the sleep of the saints is their passing into a fuller and more vivid life, and they are "satisfied," when they close their eyes on earth, to open them for heaven, and sleep to "awake in His likeness."

LESSON XVIII.

Bread from Heaven.

St. Luke ix. 10-17.

10. "And the apostles, when they were returned, told Him all that they had done. And He took them, and went aside privately into a desert place belonging to the city called Bethsaida.

11. And the people, when they knew it, followed Him: and He received them, and spake unto them of the kingdom of God, and healed them that had need of healing.

12. And when the day began to wear away, then came the twelve, and said unto Him, Send the multitude away, that they may go into the towns and country round about, and lodge, and get victuals: for we are here in a desert place.

13. But He said unto them, Give ye them to eat. And they said, We have no more but five loaves and two fishes; except we should go and buy meat for all this people.

14. For they were about five thousand men. And He said to His disciples, Make them sit down by fifties in a company.

15. And they did so, and made them all sit down.

16. Then He took the five loaves and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, He blessed them, and brake, and gave to the disciples to set before the multitude.

17. And they did eat, and were all filled: and there was taken up of fragments that remained to them twelve baskets."

THE Apostles needed rest after their trial trip as evangelists. John the Baptist's death had just been told to Christ. The Passover was at hand, and many pilgrims were on the march. Prudence and care for His followers as well as Himself suggested a brief retirement, and our Lord sought it at the Eastern Bethsaida, a couple of miles up the Jordan from its point of entrance to the

lake. Matthew and Mark tell us that He went by boat, which Luke does not seem to have known. Mark adds that the curious crowd, which followed on foot, reached the place of landing before Him, and so effectually destroyed all hope of retirement. It was a short walk round the north-western part of the head of the lake, and the boat would be in sight all the way, so that there was no escape for its passengers.

Luke records the self-oblivious cordiality of Christ's reception of the intrusive crowd. Without a sigh or sign of impatience, He "welcomed them,"—a difficult thing to do, and one which few of us could have achieved. The motives of most of them can have been nothing higher than what leads vulgar people of all ranks and countries to buzz about distinguished men, utterly regardless of delicacy or considerateness. They want to see the Notoriety, no matter what it costs Him. But Jesus received them patiently, because, as Mark touchingly tells, He was "moved with pity," and saw in their rude crowding round Him the token of their lack of guides and teachers. They seemed to Him, not merely a mob of intrusive sight-seers, but like a huddled mass of unshepherded sheep.

Christ's heart felt more lovingly than ours because His eye saw deeper, and His eye saw deeper because His heart felt more lovingly. If we would live nearer Him, we should see, as He did, enough in every man to draw out pity and help, even though he may jostle and interfere with us.

The short journey to Bethsaida would be in the early morning, and a long day of toil followed instead of the hoped-for quiet. Note that singular expression, "Them that had need of healing He healed." Why not simply "them that were sick?" Probably to bring out the thought that misery made unfailing appeal to Him, and that to see need was to supply it. His swift compassion, His all-

sufficient power to heal, and the conditions of receiving His healing, are all wrapped up in the words. Thus far the lesson has been introductory to the main subject. Coming to the miracle itself, we may throw the narrative into three parts,—the preliminaries, the miracle, and the abundant overplus.

I. Our Lord leads up to the miracle by forcing home on the minds of the disciples the extent of the need and the utter inadequacy of their resources to meet it, and by calling on them and the crowd for an act of obedience, which must have seemed to many of them ludicrous. John shows us that He had begun to prepare them, at the moment of meeting the multitude, by His question to Philip. That had been simmering in the disciples' minds all day, while they leisurely watched Him toiling in word and work, and now they come with their solution of the difficulty. Their suggestion was a very sensible one in the circumstances, and they are not to be blamed for not anticipating a miracle as the way out. However many miracles they saw, they never seem to have expected another. That has been thought to be unnatural, but surely it is true to nature. They moved in a confusing mixture of the miraculous and the natural which baffled calculation as to which element would rule at any given moment. Their faith was feeble, and Christ rebuked them for their slowness to learn the lesson of this very miracle and its twin feeding of the four thousand. They were our true brothers in their failure to grasp the full meaning of the past, and to trust His power.

The strange suggestion that the disciples should feed the crowd must have appeared to them absurd, but it was meant to bring out the clear recognition of the smallness of their supply. Therein lie great lessons. Commands are given and apparent duties laid on us, in order that we may

find out how impotent we are to do them. It can never be our duty to do what we cannot do; but it is often our duty to attempt tasks to which we are conspicuously inadequate, in the confidence that He who gives them has laid them on us to drive us to Himself, and there to find sufficiency. The best preparation of His servants for their work in the world is the discovery that their own stores are small. Those who have learned that it is their task to feed the multitude, and who have said "We have no more than such and such scanty resources," are prepared to be the distributors of His all-sufficient supply.

What a strange scene that must have been as the one hundred groups of fifty each arranged themselves on the green grass, in the setting sunlight, waiting for a meal of which there were no signs! It took a good deal of faith to seat the crowd, and some faith for the crowd to sit. How expectant they would be! How they would wonder what was to be done next! How some of them would laugh and some sneer, and all watch the event! We, too, have to put ourselves in the attitude to receive gifts of which sense sees no sign; and if, in obedience to Christ's word, we sit down expecting Him to find the food, we shall not be disappointed, though the table be spread in the wilderness, and neither storehouse nor kitchen be in sight.

II. The miracle itself has some singular features. Like that of the draught of fishes, it was not called forth by the cry of suffering, nor was the need which it met one beyond the reach of ordinary means. It was certainly one of the miracles most plainly meant to strike the popular mind, and the enthusiasm excited by it, according to John's account, was foreseen by Christ. Why did He evoke enthusiasm which He did not mean to gratify? For the very purpose of bringing the carnal expectations of the crowd to a head, that they might be the more conclusively disappointed.

The miracle and its sequel sifted and sent away many "disciples," and were meant to do so.

All the accounts tell of Christ's "blessing." Matthew and Mark do not say what He blessed, and perhaps the best supplement is "God;" but Luke says that He blessed the food. What He blesses is blessed; for His words are deeds, and communicate the blessing which they speak. The point at which the miraculous multiplication of the food came in is left undetermined, but perhaps the difference in the tenses of the verbs hints at it. "Blessed" and "brake" are in the tense which describes a single act; "gave" is in that which describes a continuous repeated action. The pieces grew under His touch, and the disciples always found His hands full when they came back with their own empty. But wherever the miraculous element appeared, creative power was exercised by Jesus; and none the less was it creative, because there was the "substratum" of the loaves and fishes. Too much stress has been laid on their being used, and some commentators have spoken as if without them the miracle could not have been wrought. But surely the distinction between pure creation and multiplication of a thing already existing vanishes when a loaf is "multiplied" so as to feed a thousand men.

The symbolical aspect of the miracle is set forth in the great discourse which follows it in John's Gospel. Jesus is the bread of God which came down from heaven. That bread is broken for us. Not in His incarnation alone, but in His death, is He the food of the world; and we have not only to "eat His flesh," but to "drink His blood," if we would live. Nor can we lose sight of the symbol of His servants' task. They are the distributors of the heaven-sent bread. If they will but take their poor stores to Jesus, with the acknowledgment of their insufficiency, He will turn them into inexhaustible supplies, and they will find

that "there is that scattereth, and yet increaseth." What Christ blesses is always enough.

III. The abundance left over is significant. Twelve baskets, such as poor travellers carried their belongings in, were filled; that is to say, each apostle, who had helped to feed the hungry, had a basketful to bring off for future wants. The "broken pieces" were not crumbs that littered the grass, but the portions that came from Christ's hands.

His provision is more than enough for a hungry world, and they who share it out among their fellows have their own possession of it increased. There is no surer way to receive the full sweetness and blessing of the gospel than to carry it to some hungry soul. These full baskets teach us, too, that in Christ's gift of Himself as the Bread of Life there is ever more than at any given moment we can appropriate. The Christian's spiritual experiences have ever an element of infinity in them; and we feel that if we were able to take in more, there would be more for us to take. Other food cloys and does not satisfy, and leaves us starving. Christ satisfies and does not cloy, and we have always remaining, yet to be enjoyed, the boundless stores, which neither eternity will age nor a universe feeding on them consume. The Christian's capacity of partaking of Christ grows with what it feeds on, and he alone is safe in believing that "to-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant."

LESSON XIX.

"In the Holy Mount."

ST. LUKE ix. 28-36.

28. "And it came to pass about an eight days after these sayings, He took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray.

29. And as He prayed, the fashion of His countenance was altered, and His raiment was white and glistering.

30. And, behold, there talked with Him two men, which were Moses and Elias:

31. Who appeared in glory, and spake of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem.

32. But Peter and they that were with Him were heavy with sleep: and when they were awake, they saw His glory, and the two men that stood with Him.

33. And it came to pass, as they departed from Him, Peter said unto Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for Thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias: not knowing what he said.

34. While he thus spake, there came a cloud, and overshadowed them: and they feared as they entered into the cloud.

35. And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is My beloved Son: hear Him.

36. And when the voice was past, Jesus was found alone. And they kept it close, and told no man in those days any of those things which they had seen."

ALL the accounts of the transfiguration carefully date it with reference to Peter's great confession and Christ's subsequent plain announcement of His sufferings. "These sayings" made an epoch in our Lord's life, both as regarded Himself and His followers, marking for Him a new step towards the cross, which was henceforth perceptibly nearer and still more familiar, and for them a new pain which might easily become apostasy. The transfiguration seems to have a bearing on both Him and them. The incident

consists of three distinct portions,—the change in our Lord's appearance, His converse with the mighty dead, and the Divine voice. Luke gives important details not found in the other accounts.

I. The transfiguration properly so called. Luke's special contribution to this part of the narrative is the mention of Christ's prayers. This is the Gospel of the Son of man, and it often dwells on that precious token of our Lord's manhood, His praying. It alone tells us how Jesus prayed at His baptism, after cleansing the leper, before choosing the twelve, and on one or two other occasions. He, our Brother, lived by prayer, as all who would live His life must do. Our narrative connects His prayer immediately with the glory shining in His face.

Luke describes the marvellous appearance less vividly and fully than the others, only saying that His face became "different," and His raiment dazzling white; but he puts emphasis on "as He was praying," almost as if he would point to the prayer as the cause of the lustre. Prayer and communion with God will imprint a glory on a homely face yet, which, though it be nowise miraculous, does none the less show where the man has been. If we lived more habitually in the secret place of the Most High, our faces would oftener seem like those of angels, and a pure and quiet heart would make itself seen there.

But the transfiguration was much more than this, or than the light on Moses' face when in the mount. The glory that shone on Christ's countenance and whitened even His garments, did not fall on Him from without, but rose, as it were, to the surface from within. "The veil, that is to say, His flesh," became partially transparent for a moment, and revealed not only the glory of grace and truth, but the lesser glory which could be made visible, at least by symbol. It was a gleam of Deity, like a stray sunbeam through a rift

in a clouded sky. So could He always have walked among men, and that brief flash increases our sense of the continual voluntary humiliation of His humble manhood, and tells us that "there was the hiding of His power."

It may be that Christ's solitary hours of communion with the Father were always accompanied with a like change, and the probability is strengthened by Luke's statement that the disciples were heavy with sleep during the greater part of the time. Primarily, then, the purpose of the transfiguration was not manifestation to them, nor can it have been encouragement to Him. We do not even know that He was aware of the radiance, any more than Moses wist that his face shone.

Nor can we venture to see in the transfiguration an adumbration of the glorifying of the body of our Lord after His ascension; for surely the change then passing on it is something far more profound than the transitory irradiation of the flesh, which was still at home among material things. It is best to recognise our ignorance and restrain our inferences, and simply accept the fact as a momentary revelation, whether eyes beheld it or no, of the glory of the indwelling Divinity, which makes more wonderful and touching His continual emptying Himself of that glory, in the body of His humiliation.

II. The appearing and conversation of the mighty dead. They came before the disciples were awake, and that mysterious colloquy had lasted for an indefinite time, before human ears caught some fragments of it. We owe to Luke the fullest account of this part of the incident. He alone tells us that our Lord's companions were "in glory," robed in like lustre to His, and "walking with Him in white." He alone tells us the subject of their speech. They did not come as to tell Him that He must die; for His plain declaration to that effect preceded this event. Did they

come to learn it from Him, and so to bear back to the dim regions whence they came the glad tidings that the long-waited-for hour was ready to strike? They stand there surely rather as learners than as teachers. Their mysterious departures from earth had less to do with their being summoned thither than had their offices while here.

The legislator and the great prophet represented all the earlier revelation, and fittingly stand at His side to whom it had all pointed. The "departure which He should accomplish at Jerusalem" was the goal of law and prophecy. The loftiest organs of revelation in the past were His heralds and servants, honoured by being allowed to tend on Him. The depths of the world of the dead were moved at His coming, and "the people that walked in darkness" saw "a great light." Jesus, too, needed strengthening, and the presence of these two may have been for Him what the angel from heaven was in Gethsemane.

The continuous conscious existence of the dead, the purpose of all "the sundry times" and "divers manners" of the past speech of God, the sovereign completeness and supremacy of the message in the Son, the central place of His death in His work,—are all set forth in that wondrous interview between these three, while the three mortals lay drenched in sleep. The remarkable expression "departure" should be noticed. It unites the ideas of the death and ascension as being stages in one journey. It suggests the perfect voluntariness of our Lord's death, as do His frequent references to it, in John's Gospel, as His going to the Father. It is interesting to note that the word is only thus used twice in the New Testament, here and in 2 Peter i. 15, in a context alluding to the transfiguration, and applied by the writer to His own death. The servant has learned to think of His "decease" as robbed of its terrors, and made, like the Master's, by the power of the Master's.

But the other words also are significant. That departure is to be "accomplished." It is a work that has to be completed, a full cup that has to be drunk. Step by step, pain by pain, horror by horror, the slow process has to be gone through. Christ's love saw all the long hours unrolled before Him, and for our sakes met and passed through them all. And it is to be accomplished "at Jerusalem," the city of the great King, the city of the temple, the earthly city of God. Nowhere else could the sacrifice be offered. The very centre of light is to be the scene of the climax of dark, ness. Not in some land ignorant of God, not in some rude corner of Palestine, but within sight of the temple walls, and amidst the sanctities of generations, the King is to be slain by His own subjects, and the world's sin is to be at once manifested in its most virulent form, and swept away.

III. The attesting voice from heaven. According to Luke, who is more detailed than the other evangelists in regard to the disciples, they slept till nearly the vanishing of Moses and Elijah. Peter's foolish speech was, according to this Gospel, called out by seeing the two majestic forms in the act of "parting from Him." The apostle was half awake, stunned and bewildered, and he thinks would fain have kept them there. There is something very naïve and childlike in the proposal to make the three tabernacles, as if these might be an inducement for the strangers to stay awhile. Peter must speak, and must be at work. He is always ready to put his oar in. Silent gazing is not enough for him, and, whatever is going on, he must be busy and foremost. "Bid me come;" "He girt his coat about him" to go to Jesus. John found it enough to sit and look and know that it was the Lord. Deep hearts are still. But the bustling inconsiderate one was very full of love too, and it said something for its loyalty and its reverence for Jesus

that the foolish speech should put the Lord first, before the majesty and the mystery of the dead who had been so mighty while they lived.

His preposterous proposal was interrupted ("while he said these things") by the descent of the cloud. One reading of Luke's words makes all six to have "entered into" it, whilst another more probably leaves the three disciples without. The remark about the voice coming "out of the cloud" seems to imply that the hearers were not within its folds. If so, then that visible symbol of the Divine presence, which had dwelt in the first temple between the cherubim, and had been absent for long ages, now again appeared, and took into its shrouded midst Moses, who had been there before for forty days and nights; Elijah, whose mortal grossness had been purged; and Jesus, whose native home it was. The disciples saw them lost in its folds with terror. They were alone, and might well wonder whether they were ever to see Jesus more. The Divine voice was meant altogether for the disciples, both in its first part, which declares Christ's dignity, and in its second, which commands their attentive acceptance of His word.

Luke's phrase "My chosen" (R.V.), instead of "beloved," recalls Isaiah's prophecy of "Mine elect, in whom My soul delighteth," and points to Jesus as occupying a place higher than Moses or Elijah. It includes all that "beloved" means, and something more, inasmuch as it implies destination and fitness for a task, as well as possession of the Father's full complacency of love. The command to "hear Him" lifts Him above lawgiver and prophet, and calls us to turn away from all other voices and give heed to His, as bringing the full-toned speech of heaven, the ultimate, perpetual, authoritative revelation of truth and duty. The three apostles are most naturally conceived of as separated from the glorious three, and lying outside the cloud, when this great voice

came to them. In them the whole world is spoken to, and the command is for each of us.

The strange light had faded from His face when He came to them, the mysterious two had vanished, the cloud had melted into the blue, the silent bare hillside was as it had been, and "Jesus was found alone." So all other teachers, helpers, guides, are lost in His light, or drop away as the ages roll on, and He only is left. But He *is* left, and He is enough and eternal. Happy are we if in life we hear Him, and if in our experience Jesus is found alone, the all-sufficient and unchanging companion and portion of our else lonely and restless spirits

LESSON XX.

The Heralds of the King.

ST. LUKE X. 1-16.

1. "After these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before His face into every city and place, whither He Himself would come.

2. Therefore said He unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He would send forth labourers into His harvest.

3. Go your ways: behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves.

4. Carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes: and salute no man by the way

5. And into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this house.

6. And if the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it: if not, it shall turn to you again.

7. And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give: for the labourer is worthy of his hire. Go not from house to house.

8. And into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you:

9. And heal the sick that are therein, and say unto them, The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you.

10. But into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you not, go your ways out into the streets of the same, and say,

11. Even the very dust of your city, which cleaveth on us, we do wipe off against you: notwithstanding be ye sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you.

12. But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable in that day for Sodom, than for that city.

13. Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon, which have been done in you, they had a great while ago repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes.

14 But it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment, than for you.

15. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shalt be thrust down to hell.

16. He that heareth you heareth Me: and he that despiseth you despiseth Me; and he that despiseth Me despiseth Him that sent Me."

THIS long section from Luke ix. 51 to xviii. 14 is peculiar to Luke, except in two or three short passages It has few notes of time or place, but seems to refer, in its earlier portion, to the last journey from Galilee to Jerusalem, which was probably circuitous, and led through places previously unvisited by our Lord. Hence the appointment of the Seventy, who were sent on a short and special business, and fell back into the ranks when it was done. The commission to them, so far it differs from that to the Twelve as recorded by Matthew, points to haste in their task. Many fancies have been indulged in as to the significance of the number,—the elders appointed by Moses, the Sanhedrim, the supposed number of Gentile nations; but perhaps it is better to leave these on one side, and simply say that seventy is the number of completeness, ten multiplied by seven, and so is a natural number to pitch upon for a somewhat numerous body.

The fact that there were male disciples enough at the end of the Galilean ministry to allow of the selection of so large a number, indicates that a very considerable body of disciples of both sexes must have been gathered there. These would, for the most part, take their leave of Jesus when He set out on this last journey, and would be the bulk of the five hundred to whom the risen Lord appeared. The mission of the Seventy shows that our Lord felt that He was about to plunge into danger, and go among unprepared and probably hostile people. It indicates the gravity of the step He was taking, and His sense that it was grave.

The saying introductory to the special charge to the Seventy is placed by Matthew before the sending out of the Twelve. It is impossible to determine which is the original place, or whether, as would be perfectly conceivable and appropriate, our Lord uttered it on two parallel occasions. The close resemblances between the charges to the Twelve

and the Seventy may have been intended by Him to assimilate the missions, and so to lift the undistinguished Seventy in their short task to a conscious equality with the more conspicuous band. The true preparation for work for Christ is the clear sight and deep feeling of the immensity of the field, the consequent pressure of need, and the small supply of labourers. These seventy had but a few villages in a little strip of country We have the world brought within arm's length by steam and electricity, by commerce and rule. Seventy messengers to the people of Southern Palestine in our Lord's time was a far larger proportion than all Christian missionaries bear to the population of the world.

Such a realisation of the miles of waving corn and the scanty band of reapers will first send a man to prayer. God is the Lord of the harvest, and the fact that it is "His" is the strongest argument in the mouth of the faithful petitioner. Surely He will take means to secure His own property. The inspiration to go forth must come from Him, and there will often be gentle violence, if one may say so, needed to push men to the work. How much of the "philosophy" of missions lies in these simple words! But note, too, that the man who prays must be ready to go himself, if he is sent; and, further, that if the answer to the prayer that the Lord of the harvest would send labourers be that Christ sends these men, then Christ assumes the Lordship of the crop and a Divine prerogative. Some of us would be very much startled if the answer to our prayer "Send" were the command "Go."

To tell men that they are to be as sheep among wolves is strange encouragement to begin work with. But "I send you" is safety. He will take care of His servants going on His errands.

The first instruction to them depends in like manner on

His sending them. They are to travel light, and to trust. This provision was expressly declared by Christ to apply only to the present case (Luke xxii. 35), but the principle underlying it is of perpetual validity. They who would do Christ's work must be unencumbered, and should be unanxious. The pleasure of many a journey is spoiled by having to look after a mountain of luggage, and the Christian efficiency of many a disciple is marred by too many possessions. A well-known English officer once said that all the baggage he needed to go round the world with was a cake of soap. Those servants of Christ will go farthest and do most who carry least weight.

The outfit settled, next comes the conduct on the road. Eastern salutations were and are long-winded affairs, and hollow to boot. Courtesy is not waste of time; but much conventionality has to be brushed aside when a man is in haste, and pressed by some great duty. The Christian messenger has no time for empty compliments, any more than a man running for a doctor for a dangerous case has. We ought to be misers of time in Christ's service, and to work as under pressure, with an eye on the clock. Social ceremonies rob us of many hours. People who have no time for Christian work because it is all taken up in dinner-parties and evening entertainments and afternoon calls, had better ask whether this instruction is quite out of date.

The journey over, the messenger comes to a house. He does not pick out the best-looking one in the village, but takes the first he comes to. A courteous greeting is in place there, and prepares the way for the message. An obvious desire for the welfare of those to whom we carry the gospel is the indispensable condition of success. We must win confidence for ourselves before we can win a higher trust for Jesus. The threadbare and unmeaning salutation gains significance on lips that have Christ's

message to follow it with, which is the gospel of peace. But the messenger is not to expect that his greeting will always be taken as he meant it. "The son of peace," of course, means one who has a nature akin to the peace invoked. Only such will receive the blessing. If the lips to which it is offered will not drink, it shall not be as water spilled on the ground, but will flow back to the source. No Christian work is lost. All produces reflex blessedness in the doer. Kindly feelings, even when spurned, warm the heart where they are kindled. If the dove finds no land to rest on, it comes back, not without an olive branch in its bill.

Once in the house, the messenger is to stop there, whether the accommodation be good or bad. There must be a plain disregard of personal advantage, if any good is to be done. "The labourer is worthy of his hire;" but he has "no purse," so he cannot take money, and if he gets enough to eat, so that he can work, he is to stay where he is, however plain the fare. If once the suspicion is raised that selfish motives actuate the messenger of Christ, he may as well stop work. To shift the field for the sake of gain, is clean contrary to Christ's mind. If the labourer deserves his hire, it is equally true that the hire deserves labour, and binds to toil, not to indolence.

The wider work in the city is looked at in view of the two possibilities of success and failure. The same law is laid down as in the case of the house. There must be the same manifest disinterestedness in public as in private. The power of miraculous healing is given, and the rousing message is to be delivered. Both work and word apply especially to the Seventy, but both point to present duties. Care for physical well-being is part of the Christian's work, and will help to get a hearing for his proper message, as medical missionaries have proved. The command includes,

in spirit, all efforts made to benefit the body and to add to external well-being. True, there must be division of labour, and the main efforts of Christian men should go to carry the good news which they only can carry; but they never make a graver mistake than when they look askance on more purely "secular" benevolent work. "Never" is too strong a word; for a greater mistake still is when professing Christians give more sympathy and help to hospitals, and the like, than to missions at home and abroad.

The solemn command to leave the rejecting city with a last, repeated testimony, closes this charge. Wiping off the dust of the city, was meant to symbolise the rupture of all connection with it; but even after that, the message was to be repeated, if, perchance, some might hear at that last moment. How the yearning of the Divine love speaks in that command! Unbelief makes no difference to the fact. The kingdom will come all the same, but the aspect of its coming changes. "Unto you" is, probably, to be omitted in verse 11; it no longer comes as a blessing, but as a foe; it is against rebels, and for subjects.

The Seventy had but little time for their work; for Jesus was close behind them, and they had to leave unproductive fields more quickly than we are allowed to do. For us the duty is to speak to men, whether they will hear or forbear, and to have long patience and undying hope. But even for us times occasionally come when we have to give up efforts, and try whether withdrawal may do more than continuance.

The charge passes into the awful declarations of judgment, first on the rejecting city, and then on the seats of our Lord's ministry in Galilee, now closed. On these verses we can only remark the salient points. Note the clear recognition of degrees in criminality and retribution, measured by degrees of light. Note the selection of the Gentile cities of worst fame: Sodom with her crimes, Tyre and Sidon,—the

very emblems, in the Prophets, of proud enmity to God. And these sties of lust and greed are to have a lighter doom than the cities of Israel. Why? Because to reject Christ is the worst of sins, containing in its most unmingled form the essence of all sin, and auguring such alienation and aversion from the light as could only come from love of darkness. What must He have thought of Himself who said that not to accept Him was the sin deserving the deepest condemnation?

Note the reference to the many mighty works done in Chorazin and Bethsaida. We know of none in the former place, and but of one in the latter. "Many other things" did Jesus, and no record of them has been preserved. Note, too, the deep pathos of this lament, drawn like a sob from the heart of Jesus. He is finishing His work in Galilee, and thus sadly He looks on its results. It has but involved those whom He loved so well, and for whom He toiled so unsparingly, in a heavier condemnation. The judge weeps over the criminals, but his tears do not make him falter in his judgment. Though Christ would—did—give His life to avert the ruin, He cannot, when He sits on the great white throne, turn the sentence away from those who have dragged it down on themselves by turning away from Him, proclaimed in their unbelieving ears.

LESSON XXI.

Who is my Neighbour? *versus* Whose Neighbour am I?

St. Luke x. 25-37.

25. "And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted Him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?

26. He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou?

27. And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.

28. And He said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.

29. But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?

30. And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.

31. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

32. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.

33. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him.

34. And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

35. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.

36. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?

37. And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise."

THIS "lawyer" merely wished to test our Lord's orthodoxy. He was quite sure that he knew what to do to inherit eternal life, and he very much doubted

whether this Nazarene did. His salutation of Jesus as Rabbi has a touch of scorn, and his question is peremptory, as if he expected to unmask a pretender. Jesus avoids the snare by retorting the question, and so giving an opportunity for the other to display his theological smartness, of which he was proud.

He gives the same answer as Christ afterwards gave to another scribe, uniting Deuteronomy vi. 5 and Leviticus xix. 18. How is this coincidence to be explained? The combination may have been familiar in the rabbinical teaching of the time, and the ready endorsement, which the scribe who heard it from Christ gives it, seems to indicate that it was not new to him; or it may have been thought out by this lawyer before he came to Jesus,—for his answer is too swift and true to have flashed on him for the first time then. If so, our Lord quoted it when a similar question was again asked Him. But, in any case, the coincidence is not sufficient reason for discrediting either narrative, as long as a possible explanation can be suggested.

Christ drives a sharp point home by approving the "answer," and demanding the "doing." He shifts the question from intellect to conscience and practice, and that pinches. The scribe's wish to justify himself refers not to self-vindication for his question, but for his failure in conduct, which, though unaccused, he tacitly confesses. The obtuseness, as well as the sensitiveness, of conscience is brought out by the fact that he evidently thinks that he has kept the first requirement of perfect and all-engrossing love to God, and is only sensible of defect in the second.

I. Note first the question, meant to excuse, but really condemning. The lawyer pleads the vagueness of the precept, and wishes a clear definition of terms, that he may know whom he is bound to love as himself, and whom he is not. He fancies that love is only to run like a canal in a

straight artificial cutting. He will try to love all within the circle, but it must be clearly drawn; and, in the meantime, he does not feel any stirrings of love to anybody outside his own door. Is it not clear that to him love is simply a matter of obligation; and does not such a conception show that he has no notion of what it really is, nor has ever exercised it?

The form of the question points to the same fatal flaw in conception and conduct. "Who is my neighbour?" means, who has a claim on me? whom am I obliged to love? and we shall see that our Lord inverts the terms in His final question. It will only be put by those who are more desirous to know who are not their neighbours than who are. "Tell me whom I must love" means "Tell me whom I may escape the necessity of loving;" and he who says that has not a glimmer of what love is. It asks no definitions, and is like the sea, not like a canal. In all matters of Christian living, the anxiety to have the bounds marked, within which the action of the Christian spirit is to be confined, is a bad sign. It indicates latent reluctance and a total misconception of the free, spontaneous, all-embracing outgoings of the life which comes from Jesus.

II. Note the details of the lovely story. It is not a parable; for a parable casts spiritual truth into material forms; which have to be translated in order to learn its meaning. It is rather a story framed as an example, needing not to be translated but copied. It gives with unsurpassable vividness and beauty three pictures,—of the poor victim, the selfishly absorbed passers-by, and the compassionate helper. The sufferer is "a man," nothing more. The others are designated by profession or nationality, but he has no label round his neck to ticket him as "neighbour." That is the beginning of an answer to the lawyer.

The Jericho road was a favourite haunt of robbers. Its

gloomy defile, with plenty of caves, suited their trade. The pictures of the assault give, in a sentence, photographs of the whole,—the sudden surrounding by the knot of ruffians who had been skulking among the rocks, the greedy stripping the man of everything, even to the last rag, the gratuitous cruelty of wounding him unresisting after getting all he had, the hurried and heartless flight, and his desperate condition as he lay there, in the fierce sunshine, bleeding and insensible.

The picture might well stir pity. What would the reality do? The two companion sketches of priest and Levite tell us. It does nothing. A glance, perhaps a thought of personal danger, but, at any rate, no stirrings of pity, and no pause, but, in the face of such a spectacle, they pass on. There is no sign that they were hindered by any pressure of time or duty from stopping to help. They did see, took a good long look, and it never struck them that they had anything to do in the matter. It might be something to talk about when they got home, and to make them think that Pilate should really have a patrol on the road; but their own safety was too precious to be put in peril by delaying where robbers were about. So neither of them will even lift him into the shade, or tie up his bleeding wounds. Is it an exaggerated picture of the conduct to which human nature is ever prone? How much less sorrow there would be in the world if we were not all guilty in this matter, and had not left misery which is forced on our notice to bleed or weep itself to death without lifting a finger to prevent it! The capacity for ignoring wretchedness and need is wonderful. Engrossment with self shuts eyes and heart to the piteous sights that fill the world.

Christ might have taught His lesson without making the unsympathising pair a priest and a Levite. His doing so is not only a piece of true "local colour," since there were

many priests resident at Jericho, and there would be continual passing from and to Jerusalem, but it is meant as a special thrust at the lawyer. Though not a priest, yet he belonged to the same class, speaking generally,—the class of "superior persons," the educated and eminently ecclesiastical, if not religious.

Our Lord's boldness in thus weighting His story with unnecessary offence is striking. He sharpens it to a spear point, and is careless about offending: He can reach the conscience. Toothless generalities offend nobody, and therefore do nobody good. "Thou art the man" needs to be pealed very plainly into the ears of culprits. But the lesson was not for the lawyer only. Formal religionists are always cold. A man may be so taken up with religious ceremonial, or dry, hair-splitting orthodoxy, that his heart is shrivelled up like a musty nut. It is possible to be so busy investigating the grounds and limits of religious duty as to forget to do it. So these heartless two teach us the terrible pitilessness of men, and its cause in self-absorption, and the special danger, in regard to it, of formal religion.

The same boldness in bringing in causes of offence which might have been spared, appears in making the rescuer a Samaritan, and in putting the hated name first in the sentence, in the original. Note how lovingly the details of his care are dwelt on. First, we have the source of all in compassion. He felt a shoot of love and pity in his heart to "the man," and that set all in motion. His conduct may be taken as a picture of what true love to the neighbour should be. It is prompt, thorough, spares no pains, acts with judgment, is generous and self-denying ("set him on his own beast," while he trudged by his side), provides for the future, and, with all its liberality, is not lavish, but thrifty and prudent. The good man carried a little stock of creature comforts with him, and these he expends according

to the surgery of the times. He tears up part of his own dress for bandages, gets the poor tottering man on his ass, braves the danger of the return of the robbers, who are, probably, not too far off to scent new booty, breaks his journey to nurse his patient for a night, and, as he is riding away in the morning, leaves a frugal but sufficient payment for a day or two, and promises to meet any further expenditure. He had good credit at the inn, and was coming back soon.

The lawyer had not asked, What is the love which I am bound to show? But Christ teaches him and us that it is not a mere lazy sentiment, but active, self-sacrificing, guided by common sense, and full of resources. It moves us to all kindly offices, and makes the needy sharers in our possessions, since they share our heart. Who can tell the deeds which have directly flowed from this picture of the Samaritan? Were there ever words which were the seeds of so much consecrated benevolence and beneficence?

But the nationality of the helper must not be passed by. Though the lesson could have been taught without it, it makes the lesson still more emphatic. It answers the question "Who?" by brushing away all national distinctions, all prejudices of race, all differences of creed, all enmities rooted in history. It is the first dawning of that great thought which nineteen centuries have been so slow to learn,—the brotherhood of man. The very word "humanity" is Christian. The idea of "philanthropy" is Christian And the practical realisation of the idea will only be attained when the great fact on which it rests is received, "One is your Master, . . . and all ye are brethren." Fraternity is a dream,—a bloody one sometimes, a Utopian one always, unless the brothers are all sons of one father, and feel the family bond.

III. Note Christ's inversion of the lawyer's question. It

makes a vast difference whether we say, "Who is my neighbour?" or "Whose neighbour am I?" for although the relation is, of course, mutual, to approach it on the one side is selfishness, and on the other is love. The one fixes attention on men's claims on me, the other on my debts to them; and while these are the same, they have a very different aspect from the two ends. The lawyer does not venture to say, "That is not what I asked you." He grudgingly, and without soiling his lips with the word "Samaritan," answers as he could not help doing; and his answer makes him proclaim the truth which Christ would have him and us learn, that, to be a true neighbour is to render help, and that we are neighbours to all men in such a sense that our compassion should go out to them all, and our practical aid be given, no matter what may be the barriers of race, or creed, or colour, or distance. True love to men will cut its own channels; will not wait to be commanded, nor ask how far it is bound to go, but spontaneously and universally will own its kinship with all the needy and sad, and will seek to be as wide and as deep as the love of God, of which it is a reflection. The world would be Paradise if we all lived the teaching of this wonderful story.

LESSON XXII.

Christ Teaching How to Pray.

St. Luke xi. 1-13

1. "And it came to pass, that, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, one of His disciples said unto Him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.

2. And He said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth.

3. Give us day by day our daily bread.

4. And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.

5. And He said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves;

6. For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him?

7. And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee.

8. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth.

9. And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.

10. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

11. If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent?

12. Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion.

13. If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?"

LUKE seems to preserve the original setting of the Lord's Prayer, and Matthew its full form. No wonder that the witnesses of Christ's prayers wished to learn

of Him how to pray! Would ours have the same effect? There is nothing to oblige us to suppose that the latter part of this lesson was spoken at the same time as the former. It may have been appended by Luke on account of similarity in subject.

I. Note the mould for the disciples' prayers. It is not the "Lord's Prayer," but His teaching of the servants' prayer. It is not a formula, but a pattern. We may repeat it or not, but we use it aright when it teaches us to shape our desires after its spirit. All the essentials are preserved in Luke's shorter version. There is first the child's cry to the Father. All Christian prayer begins with that, and Christ makes it possible so to begin, by giving to those who believe on His name power to become sons of God. Consciousness of sonship, confidence in the Father's love, the child's yearning towards Him, and the assurance that He hears, are all expressed in that one word, and, without these, our prayers are of small account.

Note the order of petitions. Those bearing on God's glory must be first; and those touching on ourselves, second. True filial love will subordinate self to God, and our heart's desires are not what they should be, unless they set with stronger current towards His glory than towards our own good. How little of our prayers is "after this manner"!

God's "name" is His revealed character. It is "hallowed" when worthy thoughts of Him and corresponding emotions dwell in men. The supreme desire of the true child of God will be that the light of His manifested beauty and goodness may shine in all hearts. That is the supreme purpose of God, because He is love, and therefore desires that men may be blessed by knowing Him for what He is. It will be our uppermost wish in proportion to our sympathy with God and our possession of the spirit of sons.

God's kingdom comes where His name is hallowed. It is that order or constitution of things in which He rules, not over ignorant tools or reluctant slaves, but over willing, because loving, sons. Its seat is within; its manifestation is outward. All social and individual good is comprehended in that prayer; for the hallowing of the name of the Father is the sole foundation of glad obedience to His sway, which is love, joy, and peace for men and nations. The second class of desires, those for the supply of the suppliant's wants, begin at the bottom and climb. Mark that we are not to say "my" but "our." Brotherhood follows sonship. This prayer runs parallel with the summary of the law as supreme love to God first, and to our neighbour as ourselves second. Therefore "our bread" naturally succeeds "our Father." That petition at once permits and limits desires for perishable sustenance. The word rendered "daily" is better taken as meaning "sufficient," and confines our wishes within very narrow bounds.

Bread, not dainties; bread sufficient, not superfluous; bread for to-day, not for to-morrow,—how many would be content with that? The prayer for God's glory comes first, because that is greatest; but that for bread comes first in its series because it is least. The need for pardon is as universal and more crying than that for bread. It is the beginning of the spiritual life, but in this connection is meant for all stages thereof, and implies some previous experience, inasmuch as it makes our forgiving the reason for our being forgiven. While it is true that we cannot receive pardon into an unmerciful heart, a prior truth is that we must have experienced that pardon before becoming truly and habitually merciful. An unforgiving Christian is a monster, and will turn out unforgiven; but a heart that forgives, and has never sought and found God's pardon, is as much of a contradiction.

This clause in the permanent model shows that Jesus expected all to need forgiveness for daily sin as for supply of daily bread. Pardon brings a profound sense of our own weakness, and we need God's protecting hand to keep us from future, as well as His mercy to forgive past sin. True, the trial of faith rightly borne is the growth of faith, and we must not desire to lose the discipline which makes strong. But whoever knows his own weak and wavering will and treacherous heart and easily kindled fleshly desires, will earnestly pray to be kept from temptations that would inflame these, even while he accepts with submission such trial of filial trust as a Father's love sends.

II. We have a parable of prayer. The centre point of it is the power of persistent importunity, which is illustrated by a seemingly most incongruous narrative. The man in bed with his children, who gets up at last for as selfish reasons as had kept him lying, is a repulsive picture of selfish indolence, both when he refuses and when he gives. But the very contrast between that temper and the love of the Father, to which prayer appeals, is the point of the story. "If" such a miserable creature, "being evil," is conquered by persistence, "how much more shall your heavenly Father give?" is the lesson here too.

The contrast is complete. Selfishness and perfect love, slothful indifference to need, and unwearied, all-embracing, never-resting beneficence, a yielding at last to save annoyance and get rid of an unwelcome presence, and a yielding which delayed for our good, and gives joyfully as soon as we are capable of receiving. Note the broken construction which, instead of going on at the end of verse 7 with the intended question, "And will not continue to importune?" passes into the assurance of the success of the importunate man. Note, too, the vivid picture of the surly sleeper, who will not say "friend," but growls out his "do not come

waking us all up," and makes "won't" into "can't." Note our Lord's insistence on His impenetrability to appeals to friendship and the utter selfishness of His final gift.

But is not all this so violently unlike God as to deprive the story of its power for the intended purpose? Not if we keep in mind the "How much more." Persistent asking can melt even such a rock as that. What can it not do when it appeals to an infinite pity and Divine desire to give? There are delays in answering prayer, and sometimes we are tempted to think that they come from motives like those of the sleeper here. But the parable is meant to draw the sharpest contrast with God's dealings, and to assure us that the reasons for delay never lie in anything but His desire to give us more and better than we ask.

Reverse the motives in it, and you get God's motives. There may be a subordinate lesson, too, in the story; namely, that we desire God's gifts aright when we do not ask them for ourselves alone, but to share them with others yet needier than we. "Our daily bread" is theirs and mine, and all spiritual gifts are to be desired, not for our advantage alone, but that we may be the better able to minister to our brethren. "Give ye them to eat" is His command, and when we find that our own store is all inadequate, we are to ask Him who has all plenty at His command; and we shall not ask in vain.

III. The confidence of prayer. Our Lord adds to the parable His assurance of the power of persistent prayer, and confirms it by an analogy which sets the parable in its right light. "Ask," "seek," and "knock," perhaps, express a gradation. Desires breathed to God are not in vain, but they must be accompanied with seeking, which is effort. What do we do to secure possession of the gifts for which we pray? Spiritual character is not built up in answer to wishes only, whether spoken or unspoken. We have to seek for

the treasure, not as if we did not know where it was, but as gold-diggers, who seek for it on their claim, because they know that it is there. The effort is to be continuous.

Knocking implies repetition as well as earnestness. The growth of Christian character is a lifelong process. More than forty and six years is this temple in building. Here, then, is another lesson to the disciples, teaching them how to pray. Prayer is to be accompanied with appropriate effort, and to be persevering.

But in what region of experience are these unconditional promises fulfilled? Where is it true that to ask is to have; that efforts are always successful; that all doors fly open at our knock? Surely not in this world of bitter disappointments and baffled desires and frustrated quests! Christ declares that the law for His disciples is, "Be it unto thee even as thou wilt." If that were so in regard to outward good, it would be a questionable blessing, and the Father in heaven would be less wise than many an earthly father, who knows that an indulged child is a "spoiled" child.

The abounding promise is true absolutely in the spiritual realm, where fuller knowledge of God, a more Christ-like character, and more blessed communion with Him, wait for all who desire them and seek them in God's way. The keys of that treasure-house are put into our hands, and we may take as much as we will; and the wider we open our desires, the larger will be the gifts which He pours into our laps. "Ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss," not joining effort and perseverance with prayer.

The closing analogy lifts the child's prayer to its true place. Mark the parallel between the "Which of you" in the parable and the "Of which of you" in verse 11. By the former our experience as petitioners is brought to illustrate the truth taught; by the latter, our experience as givers.

Bread, fish, and eggs, are the simple, staple food. To each corresponds some thing like it, but either noxious or innutritious: to the flat Eastern loaf, a stone; to the fish, a serpent; to the egg, an oval-bodied scorpion,—if limbs and tail are tucked out of sight. Sin has marred the fatherly relation, but has not so blinded us that we do not know what is good for our children, even more clearly than for ourselves; for most men want their boys to be better and happier than they are.

Fatherly love is taken for granted; the thing enforced is confidence in fatherly wisdom. Jesus charges "evil" on all men, and emphatically exempts Himself. And then He bids us not to think that the grudging giver of the parable represents God, but to take the purest, most unselfish love which we know, and purify it yet more by taking away all taint, and to think of that as a dim shadow of the infinite love and wisdom which in the heavens hears and answers our poor cries. If the child asks for a stone, supposing it bread, or for a serpent, thinking it a fish, the foolish wish will not be granted. We are not wise enough to prescribe to God. He translates mistaken desires into what they really seek after, though we know it not, and, whatever he may refuse, gives that Holy Spirit which includes all good, and is the true object of the true child's longings.

LESSON XXIII.

A Foolish Wise and Poor Rich Man.

St. Luke xii. 13-21.

13. "And one of the company said unto Him, Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me.

14. And He said unto him, Man, who made Me a judge or a divider over you?

15. And He said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.

16. And He spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully:

17. And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?

18. And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods.

19. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.

20. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?

21. So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

CHRIST'S solemn and soul-piercing words fell blunted off one heart cased in impenetrable armour of covetousness. This man, swallowed up in thoughts of the "inheritance," is like many of us, who keep a private stream of earthly plans running, while seeming to listen to Jesus. "Perhaps this Rabbi could talk my brother into fair dividing." Do we never drop into the notion that Christianity may do great good in keeping other people right, while we are deaf to its message for ourselves?

Christ's unusually stern and cold answer disclaims a commission, either from God or man, to decide squabbles about property ("judge") or to put such decisions in force ("divider"). Then has He nothing to say about injustice? Does He abjure the right and abandon the duty of ruling over the wide field of conduct concerned with wealth? By no means. If He is not to be judge and divider there, the larger part of most men's lives escapes His control. He lays down principles and supplies motives which dominate and purify that sphere; only He will not narrow Himself into a mere arbitrator of family feuds.

If the "man" and his brother would lay to heart His next words, the feud would arbitrate itself. It is for others to trim the branches; he proceeds to dig up the root. He has no more to say to the request, but He turns to the multitude, and, according to a possible translation, makes the man who proffered it His text. We might read, "Look at him—and keep yourselves from covetousness." In any case, the request is the occasion of the general warning Strictly rendered, "covetousness" here means the desire of grasping more rather than the miserly clutching tight of the already possessed; but the reading "all covetousness" may give a certain elasticity to the word, so as to cover all forms of undue desire after, and delight in worldly good. It suggests, too, how protean is that vice, how subtle and manifold its disguises, how widespread its sway, and how insidious its approaches.

Mark the only reason here assigned for the warning. It does not fall to my lot to discuss the difficulties in rendering the latter part of verse 15, which, for our purposes, may stand as in the Authorised Version and the Revised Version. But it is to be observed that "life" there means simply physical life, and that the one reason which our Lord gives for His warning is that worldly goods cannot keep a man

alive. Of course, there are other reasons, and the meaning sometimes put into these words is perfectly true, though not intended here; namely, that the true life of a man consists not in what he possesses, but in what he is. Of course, too, there are many other reasons for the warning, and this one is a well-worn commonplace; but, after all, it is the strongest reason. The abundance of the things which he possesseth can do much for a man; but one thing they cannot do, on which all the rest of their power depends,—they cannot keep the breath in him, and, if it is out, they are of no more use. "Threadbare morality," it may be said, "scarcely worth coming from heaven to tell us;" but Jesus did not disdain to repeat familiar truths, and no commonplaces of morals are too threadbare to be reiterated, until they are practised. When we have all given up chasing after riches, as if we could keep them ours, or they could keep us alive, for ever, it will be time to stop urging this solemn thought which our Master here presses on us all. The parable is devoted to that one purpose. It is, like the story of the Good Samaritan, an instance invented to set forth a certain course of conduct, rather than a parable in the stricter sense. The rich farmer is an imaginary member of a class, not a figure representing it.

There are but two stages in the "parable,"—what the foreseeing rich man said to himself, and what God said to the blind rich man. There is something very grim and terrible in the juxtaposition of these two elements of the picture, enhanced, as it is, by the long-drawn-out statement of the man's projects, and the contrasted, crashing brevity of the Divine word which smites them to dust. Note, then, the self-satisfied talk of the prosperous man with himself. He is rich, for Jesus is attacking the covetousness of possession rather than of hankering after wealth. He has made his money honestly in the innocent occupation of a farmer.

God's sun has shone on the fields of the unthankful, and his abundant harvest—what has it done for him? It has only added to his cares. He has no gratitude, and no enjoyment yet.

How clear and deep an insight Jesus had into the misery of wealth, when He made the first effect of prosperity on this man to be reasoning within himself and perplexity as to what he was to do! How many rich men cannot sleep for wondering how they are to invest their money! But the perplexity is not altogether displeasing to the farmer. Observe how delicately the pride of ownership is hinted at in the "my's" with which his talk is so plentifully sprinkled, —"my fruits," "my barns," "my corn," "my goods," and even "my soul." "My" is the devil's pronoun. Its continual use hardens against the claims of brotherhood and the recognition of God, the giver and owner of all. This man is provident and enterprising. He sees quickly and clearly, and makes up his mind promptly to face the necessary expenditure entailed by prosperity. He has many of the virtues which commercial communities adore, and, if he were in New York or Manchester to-day, would command universal respect for his sagacity, providence, quickness in seeing the course and taking it. Pull down the old premises at once, if they are getting too small; do not let sentiment or expense stand in the way. Do not ask whether the business is not big enough already, but keep pace with its inclination to grow, and lose no time about it.

Perhaps if the farmer had looked about him, he could have found some empty barns not far off, and some bare cupboards that would have taken the surplus and saved the new buildings. But that does not occur to him. "All my corn and my goods" are to be housed as mine. Looked at from the world's point of view, he is a model man of business. If he lived in England, he would certainly be in Parliament

if he had tastes that way, and, wherever he might live, would be "an influential and highly respected citizen." He adds to all his other claims on the world's esteem, that he is just about to retire on a well-earned competence to enjoy well-deserved leisure. His ideal of enjoyment is somewhat low. But how unconsciously he acknowledges that wealth has hitherto failed to bring peace! "Take thine ease" confesses that there has been no ease yet in his life; and unless he has really "many years" to live, there will have been none.

That is the experience of thousands of prosperous men, who toil and fret till old age, to amass wealth, before they begin to get the good of it, even according to their own poor notions of good, and then have but a year or two at the fag-end of their days in which to enjoy it. Toil in getting and anxiety in keeping far outweigh the pride of possessing, and to be able to say "my goods" is but a poor result of slaving for years. The hard work done in getting has spoiled the farmer for enjoying, and all the pleasure that he can think of in his leisure is eating and drinking. He would soon have wanted to get back to his fields and his toil there. But his case is that of many prosperous men nowadays, who have no tastes but the coarsest, and, when they go out of business, are miserable. They cannot eat and drink all day, and they have killed so much in themselves, by their course of life, that they care nothing for books, or thought, or nature, or God, and so live empty lives, and try to fancy they like it.

If one gleam of self-sacrificing benevolence or one flash of self-transfiguring religion had lit up this poor, rich man's vision of his earthly future, it would have changed it all. But an utterly selfish soul has few pleasures, and can only bury itself in fleshly delights. How awfully "God said unto him" breaks the thin tissue of the man's dreams! We need not ask whether a Divine premonition of death is meant, or whether, since God speaks by acts, death itself is intended

by the phrase. Nor need we ask whether "they require thy soul" means anything more than "thy soul is required." The important points are the Divine designation of every such life as folly, the swift snatching away of the soul, and the unanswerable question as to the ownership of the wealth. God addresses men in their true characters. When He does, the man knows himself for what he is, and others know him. The end of every self-deceiving life will tear down the veils, and the conscience will echo the Divine voice, and feel "I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly." All lives greedily gripping to earthly good, and making it the be-all and end-all, are folly, and so is the presumption that reckons on many years.

The soul which he had called "my soul" is demanded from him. That is a description of death, not of judgment. He called it his, but he cannot keep it. A good man dying commits his soul into the Father's hands, but this "fool" would fain cling to life, and has reluctantly to surrender it to the stern voice which demands and will not be put off. The grim reality of death, set by the side of the shattered projects of self-indulgent life, shows what a fool he is. And the last touch which perfects the picture of his folly is the question, which he cannot answer, Whose shall they be? and the bitter irony of "thou hast prepared." What foresight which did not foresee the possibility of leaving them! What preparation which got the "things" ready for a moment that never comes! "His glory shall not descend after him." "This their way is their folly."

The parable is finally pointed to a specific application. "So is he" refers both to the folly and the fate of the man. The same absurdity is committed and the same end is certain, though not always with the same startling suddenness and completeness. Come how it may, the separation of the worldly soul from all its "goods" is sure to come, and "he

that getteth riches" or sets his heart on them, "shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end shall be a fool." The sin and folly lie, not only in amassing, but in doing so for self; and the only way to escape the snares of worldly wealth is to be "rich toward God."

That phrase, in this connection, cannot mean, as it is often taken to mean,—having God for our true portion and wealth. It must mean the holding of the same kind of riches as the rich fool had to his ruin, in the opposite way from his. "Toward God" is the antithesis to "for himself," and the whole clause describes the only wise use of earthly good as being its consecration to the service of God. He who holds all as from Him, and who uses all with direct reference to Him, and for the ends which He approves, will escape the temptations on which so many lives are wrecked, and death will not part such a man from any good, but put him in possession of incorruptible riches. Outward wealth cannot preserve life, but the true riches which Christ gives are within and cannot be lost, but are as "a well of water springing up unto eternal life."

LESSON XXIV.

Anxious about Earth, or Earnest about the Kingdom.

ST. LUKE xii. 22-34.

22. "And He said unto His disciples, Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on.

23. The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment.

24. Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls?

25. And which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit?

26. If ye then be not able to do that thing which is least, why take ye thought for the rest?

27. Consider the lilies how they grow; they toil not, they spin not: and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

28. If then God so clothe the grass, which is to day in the field, and to morrow is cast into the oven; how much more will He clothe you, O ye of little faith?

29. And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind.

30. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things.

31. But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you.

32. Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

33. Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth.

34. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

THE parable of the rich fool was spoken to the multitude, but our Lord now addresses the disciples. "Therefore" connects the following with the foregoing teachings. The warnings against anxiety are another appli-

cation of the prohibition of laying up treasure for self. Torturing care is the poor man's form of worldliness, as luxurious self-indulgence is the rich man's. There are two kinds of gout, as doctors tell us,—one from high living, and one from poverty of blood. This lesson falls into two parts, —the prohibition against anxious care (vers. 22-31), and the exhortation to set the affections on the true treasure (vers. 31-34).

I. The first part gives the condemnation of anxiety about earthly necessities. The precept is first stated generally, and then followed by a series of reasons enforcing it. As to the precept, we may remark that the disciples were mostly poor men, who might think that they were in no danger of the folly branded in the parable. They had no barns bursting with plenty, and their concern was how to find food and clothing, not what to do with superfluities. Christ would have them see that the same temper may be in them, though it takes a different shape. Dives and Lazarus may be precisely alike.

The temper condemned here is "self-consuming care," the opposite of trust. Its misery is forcibly expressed by the original meaning of the Greek word, which implies being torn in pieces, and thus paints the distraction and self-inflicted harassment which are the lot of the anxious mind. Prudent foresight and strenuous work are equally outside this prohibition. Anxiety is so little akin to foresight that it disables from exercising it, and both hinders from seeing what to do to provide daily bread, and from doing it.

The disciples' danger of being thus anxious may be measured by the number and variety of reasons against it given by Jesus. The first of these is that such anxiety does not go deep enough, and forgets how we come to have lives to be fed and bodies to be clothed. We have received the greater, life and body, without our anxiety. The rich fool

could keep his goods, but not his "soul," or "life." How superficial, then, after all, our anxieties are, when God may end life at any moment! Further, since the greater is given, the less which it needs will be also given. The thought of God as "a faithful Creator" is implied. We must trust Him for the "more"; we may trust Him for the less.

The second reason bids us look with attention at examples of unanxious lives abundantly fed. Perhaps Elijah's feathered providers, or the words of the Psalmist (Psalm cxlvii. 9), were in Christ's mind. The raven was one of the "unclean" birds, and of ill omen, from Noah's days, and yet had its meat in due season, though that meat was corpses. Notice the allusions to the preceding parable in "sow not, neither reap," and in "neither have storehouse nor barn." In these particulars the birds are inferior to us, and, so to speak, the harder to care for. If they who neither work nor store still get their living, shall not we, who can do both? Our superior value is in part expressed by the capacity to sow and reap; and these are more wholesome occupations for a man than worrying.

How lovingly Jesus looked on all creatures, and how clearly He saw everywhere God's hand at work! As Luther said, "God spends every year in feeding sparrows more than the revenues of the King of France."

The third reason is the impotence of anxiety (ver. 25). It is difficult to decide between the two possible renderings here. That of "a cubit" to the "stature" corresponds best with the growth of the lilies, while "age" preserves an allusion to the rich fool, and avoids treating the addition of a foot and a half to an ordinary man's height as a small thing. But age is not measured by cubits, and it is best to keep to "stature."

At first sight, the argument of verse 23 seems to be now inverted, and, what was "more," to be now "least." But the

supposed addition, if possible, would be of the very smallest importance as regards ensuring food or clothing, and, measured by the Divine power required to effect it, is less than the continual providing which God does. That smaller work of His, no anxiety will enable us to do. How much less can we effect the complicated and wide-reaching arrangements needed to feed and clothe ourselves! Anxiety is impotent. It only works on our own minds, racking them in vain, but has no effect on the material world, not even on our own bodies, still less on the universe.

The fourth reason bids us look with attention at examples of unanxious existence clothed with beauty. Christ here teaches the highest use of nature, and the noblest way of looking at it. The scientific botanist considers how the lilies grow, and can tell all about cells and chlorophyll and the like. The poet is in raptures with their beauty. Both teach us much, but the religious way of looking at nature includes and transcends both the others. It is a parable. It is a visible manifestation of God, and His ways there shadow His ways with us, and are lessons in trust.

The glorious colours of the lily come from no dyer's vats nor the marvellous texture of their petals from any loom. They are inferior to us in that they do not toil or spin, and in their short blossoming time. Man's "days are as grass; as a flower of the field so he flourisheth;" but his date is longer, and therefore he has a larger claim on God. "God clothes the grass of the field" is a truth quite independent of scientific truths or hypotheses about how He does it. If the colours of flowers depend on the visits of insects, God established the dependence, and is the real cause of the resulting loveliness.

The most modern theories of the evolutionist do not in the least diminish the force of Christ's appeal to creation's witness to a loving care in the heaven. But that appeal

teaches us that we miss the best and plainest lesson of nature, unless we see God present and working in it all, and are thereby heartened to trust quietly in His care for us, who are better than the ravens because we have to sow and reap, or than the lilies because we must toil and spin.

Verse 29 adds to the reference to clothing a repeated prohibition as to the other half of our anxieties, and thus rounds off the whole with the same double warning as in verse 22. But it gives a striking metaphor in the new command against "being of doubtful mind." The word so rendered means to be lifted on high, and thence to be tossed from height to depth, as a ship in a storm. So it paints the wretchedness of anxiety as ever shuttlecocked about between hopes and fears, sometimes up on the crest of a vain dream of good, sometimes down in the trough of an imaginary evil. We are sure to be thus the sport of our own fancies, unless we have our minds fixed on God in quiet trust, and therefore stable and restful.

Verse 30 gives yet another reason against not only anxiety, but against that eager desire after outward things which is the parent of anxiety. If we "seek after" them, we shall not be able to avoid being anxious and of doubtful mind. Such seeking, says Christ, is pure heathenism. The nations of the world who know not God make these their chief good, and securing them the aim of their lives. If we do the like, we drop to their level. What is the difference between a heathen and a Christian, if the Christian has the same objects and treasures as the heathen? That is a question which a good many so-called Christians at present would find it hard to answer.

But the crowning reason of all is kept for the last. Much of what precedes might be spoken by a man who had but the coldest belief in Providence. But the great and blessed faith in our Father God, scatters all anxious care. How

should we be anxious if we know that we have a Father in heaven, and that He knows our needs? He recognises our claims on Him. He made the needs, and will send the supply. That is a wide truth, stretching far beyond the mere earthly wants of food and raiment. My wants, so far as God has made me to feel them, are prophecies of God's gifts. He has made them as doors by which He will come in and bless me. How, then, can anxious care fret the heart which feels the Father's presence, and knows that its emptiness is the occasion for the gift of a Divine fulness? Trust is the only reasonable temper for a child of such a Father. Anxious care is a denial of His love or knowledge or power.

II. Verses 31-34 point out the true direction of effort and affection, and the true way of using outward good so as to secure the higher riches. It is useless to tell men not to set their longings or efforts on worldly things unless you tell them of something better. Life must have some aim, and the mind must turn to something as supremely good. The only way to drive out heathenish seeking after perishable good is to fill the heart with the love and longing for eternal and spiritual good. The ejected demon comes back with a troop at his heels unless his house be filled. To seek "the kingdom," to count it our highest good to have our wills and whole being bowed in submission to the loving will of God, to labour after entire conformity to it, to postpone all earthly delights to that, and to count them all but loss if we may win it,—this is the true way to conquer worldly anxieties, and is the only course of life which will not at last earn the stern judgment, "Thou fool."

That direction of all our desires and energies to the attainment of the kingdom which is the state of being ruled by the will of God, is to be accompanied with joyous, brave confidence. How should they fear whose desires and

efforts run parallel with the "Father's good pleasure"? They are seeking, as their chief good, what He desires, as His chief delight, to give them. Then they may be sure that, if He gives that, He will not withhold less gifts than may be needed. He will not "spoil the ship for a ha'p'orth of tar," nor allow His children, whom He has made heirs of a kingdom, to starve on their road to their crown. If they can trust Him to give them the kingdom, they may surely trust Him for bread and clothes.

Mark, too, the tenderness of that "little flock." They might fear when they contrasted their numbers with the crowds of worldly men; but, being a flock, they have a Shepherd, and that is enough to quiet anxiety.

Seeking and courage are to be crowned by surrender of outward good and the use of earthly wealth in such manner as that it will secure an unfailing treasure in heaven. The manner of obeying this command varies with circumstances. For some the literal fulfilment is best; and there are more Christian men to-day, whose souls would be delivered from the snares if they would part with their possessions, than we are willing to believe.

Sometimes the surrender is rather to be effected by the conscientious consecration and prayerful use of wealth. That is for each man to settle for himself. But what is not variable is the obligation to set the kingdom high above all else, and to use all outward wealth, as Christ's servants, not for luxury and self-gratification, but as in His sight and for His glory. Let us not be afraid of believing what Jesus and His apostles plainly teach, that wealth so spent here is treasured in heaven, and that a Christian's place in the future life depends upon this among other conditions,—how he used his money here.

LESSON XXV.

Work which Hallows the Sabbath.

St. Luke xiii. 10-17.

10. "And He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath.

11. And, behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself.

12. And when Jesus saw her, He called her to Him, and said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity.

13. And He laid His hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.

14. And the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because that Jesus had healed on the Sabbath day, and said unto the people, There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day.

15. The Lord then answered him, and said, Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering?

16. And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?

17. And when He had said these things, all His adversaries were ashamed: and all the people rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by Him."

THIS miracle was wrought, unasked, on a woman, in a synagogue, and by all these characteristics was specially interesting to Luke. He alone records it. The narrative falls into two parts,—the miracle, and the covert attack of the ruler of the synagogue, with our Lord's defence.

What better place than the synagogue could there be for a miracle of mercy? The service of man is best built on the service of God, and the service of God is as truly

accomplished in deeds of human kindness done for His sake as in oral worship. The religious basis of beneficence and the beneficent manifestation of religion are commonplaces of Christian practice and thought from the beginning, and are both set forth in our Lord's life. He did not substitute doing good to men for worshipping God, as a much belauded antichristian writer has recently done; but He showed us both in their true relations.

We have Christ's authority for regarding the woman's infirmity as the result of demoniacal possession, but the case presents some singular features. There seems to have been no other consequence than her incapacity to stand straight. Apparently the evil power had not touched her moral nature, for she had somehow managed to drag herself to the synagogue to pray; she "glorified God" for her cure, and Christ called her "a daughter of Abraham," which surely means more than simply that she was a Jewess. It would seem to have been a case of physical infirmity only, and perhaps rather of evil inflicted eighteen years before than of continuous demoniacal possession.

But be that as it may, there is surely no getting over our Lord's express testimony here, that purely physical ills, not distinguishable from natural infirmity, were then, in some instances, the work of a malignant, personal power. Jesus knew the duration of the woman's "bond" and the cause of it, by the same supernatural knowledge. That sad, bowed figure, with eyes fixed on the ground, and unable to look into His face, which yet had crawled to the synagogue, may teach us lessons of patience and of devout submission. She might have found good excuses for stopping at home, but she, no doubt, found solace in worship and she would not have so swiftly "glorified God for her cure, if she had not often sought Him in her infirmity. They who wait on Him often find more than they expect in His house.

Note the flow of Christ's unasked sympathy and help. We have already seen several instances of the same thing in this Gospel. The sight of misery ever set the chords of that gentle, unselfish heart vibrating, as surely as the wind draws music from the Æolian harp strings. So it should be with us, and so would it be, if we had in us "the law of the spirit of life in Christ" making us "free from the law of" self. But that spontaneous sympathy is not merely the perfection of manhood; it is the revelation of God. Unasked the Divine love pours itself on men, and gives all that it can give to those who do not seek, that they may be drawn to seek the better gifts which cannot be given unasked. God "tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men," in giving His greatest gift. No prayers besought Heaven for a Saviour. God's love is its own motive, and wells up by its inherent diffusiveness. Before we call, He answers.

Note the manner of the cure. It is twofold,—a word and a touch. The former is remarkable, as not being, like most of the cures of demoniacs, a command to the evil spirit to go forth, but an assurance to the sufferer, fitted to inspire her with hope, and to encourage her to throw off the alien tyranny. The touch was the symbol to her of communicated power,—not that Jesus needed a vehicle for His delivering strength, but that the poor victim, crushed in spirit, needed the outward sign to help her in realising the new energy that ran in her veins, and strengthened her muscles. Unquestionably the cure was miraculous, and its cause was Christ's will.

But apparently the manner of cure gave more place to the faith of the sufferer, and to the effort which her faith in Christ's word and touch heartened her to put forth, than we find in other miracles. She "could in no wise lift herself up," not because of any malformation or deficiency in

physical power, but because that malign influence laid a heavy hand on her will and body, and crushed her down. Only supernatural power could deliver from supernatural evil, but that power wrought through as well as on her; and when she believed that she was loosed from her infirmity, and had received strength from Jesus, she was loosed.

This makes the miracle no less, but it makes it a mirror in which the manner of our deliverance from a worse dominion of Satan is shadowed. Christ is come to loose us all from the yoke of bondage, which bows our faces to the ground, and makes us unfit to look up. He only can loose us, and His way of doing it is to assure us that we are free, and to give us power to fling off the oppression in the strength of faith in Him.

Note the immediate cure and its immediate result. The "back bowed down always" for eighteen weary years is not too stiff to be made straight at once. The Christ-given power obliterates all traces of the past evil. Where He is the physician, there is no period of gradual convalescence, but "the thing is done suddenly;" and, though in the spiritual realm, there still hang about pardoned men remains of forgiven sin, they are "sanctified" in their inward selves, and have but to see to it that they work out in character and conduct that righteousness and holiness of truth which they have received in the new nature given them through faith.

How rapturous was the gratitude from the woman's lips, which broke in upon the formal, proper, and heartless worship of the synagogue! The immediate hallowing of her joy into praise surely augurs a previously devout heart. Thanksgiving generally comes so swiftly after mercies, when prayer has habitually preceded them. The sweetest sweetness of all our blessings is only enjoyed when we glorify

God for them. Incense must be kindled, to be fragrant, and our joys must be fired by devotion, to give their rarest perfume.

The cavils of the ruler and Christ's defence are the second part of this lesson. Note the blindness and cold-heartedness born of religious formalism. This synagogue official has no eye for the beauty of Christ's pity, no heart to rejoice in the woman's deliverance, no ear for the music of her praise. All that he sees is a violation of ecclesiastical order. That is the sin of sins in his eyes. He admits the reality of Christ's healing power, but that does not lead him to recognition of his mission. What a strange state of mind it was that acknowledged the miracle, and then took offence at its being done on the Sabbath!

Note, too, his disingenuous cowardice in attacking the people when he meant Christ. He blunders, too, in his scolding; for nobody had come to be healed. They had come to worship; and even if they had come for healing, the coming was no breach of Sabbath regulations, whatever the healing might be. There are plenty of people like this stickler for propriety and form, and if you want to find men blind as bats to the manifest tokens of a Divine hand, and hard as millstones toward misery, and utterly incapable of glowing with enthusiasm or of recognising it, you will find them among ecclesiastical martinets, who are all for having "things done decently and in order," and would rather that a hundred poor sufferers should continue bowed down than that one of their regulations should be broken in lifting them up. The more men are filled with the spirit of worship, the less importance will they attach to the pedantic adherence to its forms, which is the most part of some people's religion.

Mark the severity, which is loving severity, of Christ's answer He speaks to all who shared the ruler's thoughts,

of whom there were several present (ver. 17, "adversaries"). Piercing words which disclose hidden and probably unconscious sins, are quite in place on the lips into which grace was poured. Well for those who let Him tell them their faults now, and do not wait for the light of judgment to show themselves to themselves for the first time.

Wherein lay these men's hypocrisy? They were pretending zeal for the Sabbath, while they were really moved by anger at the miracle, which would have been equally unwelcome on any day of the week. They were pretending that their zeal for the Sabbath was the result of their zeal for God, while it was only zeal for their rabbinical niceties, and had no religious element at all. They wished to make the Sabbath law tight enough to restrain Jesus from miracles, while they made it loose enough to allow them to look after their own interests.

Men may be unconscious hypocrites, and these are the most hopeless. We are all in danger of fancying that we are displaying our zeal for the Lord, when we are only contending for our own additions to, or interpretations of, His will. There is no religion necessarily employed in enforcing forms of belief or conduct.

Our Lord's defence is, first of all, a conclusive *argumentum ad hominem*, which shuts the mouths of the objectors; but it is much more. The Talmud has minute rules for leading out animals on the Sabbath: An ass may go out with his pack saddle if it was tied on before the Sabbath, but not with a bell or a yoke; a camel may go out with a halter, but not with a rag tied to his tail; a string of camels may be led if the driver takes all the halters in his hand, and does not twist them, but they must not be tied to one another,—and so on for pages. If, then, these sticklers for rigid observance of the Sabbath admitted that a beast's thirst was reason enough for work to relieve it, it did not

lie in their mouths to find fault with the relief of a far greater human need.

But the words hold a wider truth, applicable to our conduct. The relief of human sorrow is always in season. It is a sacred duty which hallows any hour. "Is not this the fast [and the feast too] that I have chosen, . . . to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?" The spirit of the words is to put the exercise of beneficence high above the formalities of worship.

Note, too, the implied assertion of the dignity of humanity, the pitying tone of the "lo, these eighteen years," the sympathy of the Lord with the poor woman, and the implication of the terrible tragedy of Satan's bondage.

If we have His spirit in us, and look at the solemn facts of life as He did, all these pathetic considerations will be present to our minds as we behold the misery of men, and, moved by the thoughts of their lofty place in God's scheme of things, of their long and dreary bondage, of the evil power that holds them fast, and of what they may become, even sons and daughters of the Highest, we shall be fired with the same longing to help which filled Christ's heart, and shall count that hour consecrated, and not profaned, in which we are able to bring liberty to the captives, and an upward gaze of hope to them that have been bowed down.

LESSON XXVI.

Thorough-going Disciples.

St. Luke xiv. 25-35.

25. "And there went great multitudes with Him: and He turned, and said unto them,

26. If any man come to Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.

27. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after Me, cannot be My disciple.

28. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?

29. Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him,

30. Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish.

31. Or what king, going to make war against another king sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand?

32. Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace.

33. So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple.

34. Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be seasoned?

35. It is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill: but men cast it out. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

THE parable of the great feast showed how earthly things hinder accepting heavenly good. The solemn teaching of this lesson follows up the parable with the requirement of complete surrender of these as the indispensable condition of discipleship. The connection in place or time is uncertain, but that in subject is plain.

Crowds followed Christ, perhaps on their way to the feast at Jerusalem. But He will have no recruits enlisted on false pretences, and rather discourages than stimulates inconsiderate adhesion.

The clear presentation of difficulties stifles no genuine earnestness, but rather fans the flame. To repel is often the surest way to attract. These light-minded crowds, following Him with curiosity, and some of them possibly thinking that He was going to Jerusalem to claim a kingdom, have to be taught what following means. It is no holiday stroll, nor triumphal march, in which they are joining, but a procession to a cross. So, if they are not ready for that, they had better not come after Him, and, at any rate, must come with their eyes open, if at all.

I. *Our Lord Lays Down the Law of Discipleship.*—The "coming unto Me" in verse 26 is the outward attaching one's self to Him, with the view of being a disciple, and to all such "comers" He unfolds the stringent terms on which alone they can be truly His scholars. There is a twofold requirement, the solemnity of the statement of which is increased by that repeated "he cannot be My disciple." The first requirement refers to the heart; the second, to the life. In the preceding parable, possessions kept back from the feast, and even the "wife" was rather a possession than an object of love. Here the searching beam goes deeper into the heart. Jesus claims the subordination, and, if necessary, the sacrifice, of all other love to the supreme love to Himself, as the prime indispensable condition of all discipleship.

We need not wonder at that strong word "hate," at which only prosaic, matter-of-fact interpreters will stumble. The "hate" which embraces all whom nature and God bid us love, and our own lives also, cannot be the earthly, passionate loathing, attended by desire to harm, which goes

by that name, but detachment of heart consequent on supreme attachment of heart to Jesus,—the purifying of earthly love by loving only in Him, rigid subordination of the closest ties, and the readiness to sacrifice the tenderest of these when they come in the way of our higher love to Christ. Any great overmastering love seems to "kill the flock of all affections else." How much more will true love to Jesus do this! The surface springs dry up when a deeper shaft taps the underlying sources.

Mark the tremendous claim which Christ here makes, in assuming His right to the throne in all our hearts. What gives Him the right, and how can He satisfy the love which He demands? Surely He who thus speaks must be conscious of Divinity, else His claim is blasphemous. Surely He not only is, but does, what deserves and draws, and will bless with full fruition the fullest love of every heart. Did He ever make a plainer assertion of His Divine nature, and of the infinite worth of His sacrifice, than in this demand? Mark the stringent condition of discipleship. Unless we love Him so much that we love none beside, but all in Him, and are ready to surrender the dearest, and life itself, if these block our road to Him, we may "come after Him" outwardly, by profession and the like, but we cannot be His disciples. The hollow unreality of a dreadful proportion of the Christianity of this day should shrivel up to nothing before the consuming fire of such a demand, as imperative to-day as ever.

The second requirement applies to conduct. The first calls for the surrender of the dearest; the second, for the acceptance of the most painful. The cross had only been known to the Jews since the Roman conquest, and was associated in their minds, not only with the idea of pain but of humiliation. There is here a veiled reference to Christ's own cross, as if He had said, "I, on this journey in which

you are following Me so eagerly and blindly, am going to My cross. If you could see, it is already lying on My shoulder. If you follow Me, you, too, will have to carry a cross."

Note the two halves of conduct which together make up real discipleship,—taking up each the cross which is "his own," and, second, imitating Christ. Every true Christian has his own special burden of humiliation, difficulty, self-denial, to carry. Mine is not the same as my fellows, but all of us are cross-bearers. Some of us try to get off, as the Crusaders did, by having a bit of red rag cut cross-shape and sewed on our sleeves. That is the fashionable sort of discipleship; but it is not real. The cross is heavy, and hard to carry; but unless we do carry it, we are not His. And all the procession of cross-bearers go after the Lord. That implies the imitation of Jesus as the very badge of discipleship, and it contains a blessed lightening of the severity of the previous requirement; for, if we follow after Him, our crosses grow light, remembering His, and with Him for leader and companion.

II. *Two Illustrative Similes, which may almost be called Parables, enforce the Law.*

I. The Rash Builder.—This simile sets forth discipleship in its aspect of building up the noble and conspicuous structure of a Christ-like character. That is the lifelong work of a true disciple. Slowly, course by course, the stones have to be laid, each by a distinct effort, and all according to the plan of the great Architect, and on the foundation other than which no man can lay. The great ideal must be clear before the true disciple. Life is not for enjoyment, nor for worldly ends, but for building up Christ-like character, and all outward things are but scaffolding to further the building.

The second point is the need of expenditure to secure this

end. Building costs money, as many a man who takes to it rashly finds out. And the most costly of all building is the building of ourselves. That takes and tasks all the resources of a lifetime. It is only accomplished on condition of spending all our living; or, in other words, we are not disciples unless we surrender self and all we have. The world and the church are full of born ruins, if we may so call these melancholy, abortive lives, which begin so boldly and come to a dead stop so soon, like the unfinished temples and palaces in a deserted city.

From these thoughts follows plainly the other, that there must be deliberate, open-eyed recognition of what being a Christian involves, at the beginning, if there is not to be failure long before the end. Deliberate calculation is vividly painted in the "sitting down" of the builder to count the cost. Christ asks for such deliberate choice, made in full view of the sacrifices required. But what if the result of the calculation be, as it certainly will be, to convince that we have not the power to build this tower? Are we to give up discipleship? No. For they who know that they can do nothing of themselves, are they who will most humbly look for, and most certainly receive, the grace that will keep them steadfast and growing; and they who fail are precisely those who begin with swaggering self-sufficiency.

The bystanders mock, as they have a right to do. Thorough-going Christians may be disliked, but they are respected; half-and-half ones get and merit the curled lips and sarcasms of the world. Earnestness awes and sometimes excites hostility, but inconsistency only amuses. Who can help laughing at the runner, who starts off at top speed, as though he were coming in an easy first, and stops dead after a hundred yards? How many Christians there are of that sort!

II. The Rash Soldier.—The second simile presents the

Christian life as warfare. There is not only need for continuous effort as in building, but for continual struggle with an enemy stronger than ourselves. It is perhaps pressing the simile too far to lay any stress on the representation of the warrior as a king; but it may at least be noted as a hint of the royal dignity of the true Christian, which is yet a contested dignity that has to fight for existence. The king with twenty thousand represents the terrible array of foes, probably with a hint of their personal head which the true disciple has to meet; and our Lord here warns men not to begin the conflict, unless they are prepared to fight it out to the death.

Does He then advise a man who feels himself too weak to conquer evil to give up the struggle, and to become its tributary slave? That would be a counsel of despair. But the words following the similes show that no such meaning is to be attached to this one. If we find that we have not enough force to meet the enemy, the recognition of our weakness, and the abandonment of all trust in self, will bring an ally into the field whose reinforcements will make us more than conquerors. To forsake all that we have is to forsake it as the ground of confidence, as well as to withdraw love from it, and to give up the selfish use of it. Whosoever thus forsakes all that he has, thereby has all that he needs for the battle. If we put on the harness boasting, we shall put it off defeated. If we go into the fight feeling our own weakness, and trusting wholly in Jesus to teach our hands to war, and to cover our heads in the day of battle, we shall come out victorious, and receive the conqueror's wreath.

III. *The Final Warning.*—The previous short parables have dwelt on the necessity for entire self-surrender in order to our realising the ideal of the Christian life in our own characters. Here we have that necessity urged, in order to the discharge of the Christian's office to society. The true

disciple who has forsaken all, and taken up his cross and gone after Christ, is the salt. The action of such souls on the community is to arrest corruption, and by diffusing a penetrating and sometimes biting, but always purifying, influence to sweeten and hallow what is on the road to putridity. The office of salt is less conspicuous than that of light, with which our Lord elsewhere couples it, but not less valuable. It is more the emblem of the effect of personal holiness. To be salt should be the ambition and the aim of every Christian; but nothing short of thorough-going self-surrendering discipleship will make us so.

Even that will not necessarily continue, without our watchful renewal, day by day, of the self-surrender; for the saltest salt may lose its savour. It seems doubtful whether it does so in nature, but it certainly may do so in the spiritual life. How does such loss come about? By letting the world creep back to its old place in our hearts, by letting farm and merchandise and wife and child come between us and Christ; most of all, by letting that old "life" of self which is so hard to kill, and from which these other things and persons derive all their power to hurt, reassert itself. It is a slow and often unconscious process. The salt keeps shape, colour, bulk; only the invisible savour is gone, but everything worth keeping goes with it.

If so, how can the loss be repaired? There is nothing in the world that can re-salt it. Of course, our Lord does not here close the door to the possibility of going again to Him, and getting from Him a fresh gift, even of the grace which we have so carelessly spilt; but what He means is that since disciples are to give, and not get, savour, there are none to give it them if they lose it. He is always there to give, but that is not the point in hand.

Christians who are not acting as salt are doing no good at all. Saltless salt is utterly useless, and by no means

ornamental. The only thing to do with it is to cart it away. It may do to lay on a path, but that is all it is good for. Stern words from gentle lips! But they are true, and need to be laid to heart by the professing Christians of this as of every time. The Church is clogged and weighed down with a mass of inert matter, from which all pungent power to purify and quicken others has evaporated. The savour of the real salt is diluted by this heap of dead stuff. How much stronger it would be if that were gone! The only true salt of the world is the true disciple. The true disciple is he who hates his own life and counts it, and all else, but dross that he may win Christ. We all need the warning, and therefore our Lord summons us all, since we all have ears, to hear these solemn truths, and to realise that the conditions of discipleship are the same for us as they were when He faced round to the light-minded crowd, and told them that they must take up their cross and come after Him.

LESSON XXVII.

The Feast Refused.

ST. LUKE xiv. 15-24.

15. "And when one of them that sat at meat with Him heard these things, he said unto Him, Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God.

16. Then said He unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many:

17. And sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready.

18. And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused.

19. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused.

20. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.

21. So that servant came, and shewed his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind.

22. And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room.

23. And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.

24. For I say unto you, That none of those men that were bidden shall taste of my supper."

PIOUS sentiment is cheap, and many a man who has little other religion has his mouth full of beautiful speeches about the desirableness of heaven. Balaam has many successors who say that they would like the end of the righteous for theirs. Very likely the polite speech which evoked this parable was honest enough, and the speaker did not feel that he was turning the edge of an inconvenient

command by magnifying the blessedness of the reward of keeping it. If his seemingly devout aspiration had been of the right sort, the answer to it would have been different. But Jesus seems to have detected the false ring in it, and therefore to have met it with this story of the refused feast, which warns the speaker and others to be sure that they are not excusing themselves from the banquet for which they profess to long.

I. The parable begins with an account of the preparation of, and invitations to, the feast. The representation of the blessings which Christ brings under the emblem of a banquet is rooted in Old Testament prophecy (Isa. xxv. 6; lv. 1-3). It is a "great" feast, both in regard of the rich and satisfying food and of the ample room. It provides "enough for each, enough for all, enough for evermore," meeting all the hunger and need of the soul; and because it is adequate for the whole desires and necessities of a single soul, therefore it is manifestly meant for all mankind. The preparation of the feast and the invitations cover a long time,—the whole past ages of Israel's history,—during which law and sacrifice and prophecy had been aiming to make men ready for receiving the kingdom, and had been summoning them to partake of its blessings.

Such was Christ's view of the past course of revelation,—as all preparative to Himself and His gifts. It matters little whether it can be shown to have been a custom to send a second invitation when the feast was ready. The facts to which that repeated summons corresponds is obviously the preaching of John Baptist, of our Lord Himself, and of the apostles during His life. No stress is laid on the person of the inviting servant. The fact of a more pressing summons being sent at the moment of readiness is the important thing. It marks the solemn significance of the hour at which He was speaking. His coming makes "all things ready," and

is the critical moment to which all the ages have been tending. It is an epoch-making "now" in God's dealings and in men's responsibilities.

The summons to the feast was more imperative then than ever, and demanded immediate answer. Platitudes about the blessedness of future eating bread in the kingdom were not wanted, but present decision what to say to the call which rang in the ears of Israel. We, too, have to learn the awful importance of the present moment, and to beware of losing the awakening consciousness of that in smooth generalities about any future. How we behave to God's invitation, that peals in our ears to-day, settles how we shall fare in the future.

II. The next stage is the astonishing unanimity of refusal. In ordinary life, people would scramble for invitations to such a grand feast, especially if a great man gave it. It is not usual for invitations to royal dinner-parties to go a-begging, but the improbability of the incident is the very point of it.

"They all with one consent." That is the miserable strangeness of the fate of God's invitations to the highest good. No others are treated so. The tragic unanimity of the mass of men in their refusal of the gospel, is unique in its irrational folly. Much ingenuity has been spent in endeavouring to make out the three excuses as typical of different states of mind; but there seems no very clear demarcation between the first and second, and the most obvious difference is in the increasing rudeness of the speakers. The first pleads a "must needs;" the second merely states his intention,—"I go;" the third bluntly says "I cannot," and omits the courtesy of asking to be excused.

The true lesson from all three is, that innocent and right things keep men away from the gospel feast, and that, however different the objects which are preferred to it, the

spirit which prefers them is the same. These refusers had accepted the invitation whilst it was remote, and had, no doubt, been pleased to get it; but when it turned out that they could not have the feast without giving up, for the time, their treasured possessions, they would have none of it. So the man whose piece of pious commonplace evoked the parable, and all his like, think it would be very delightful to eat bread in the kingdom, but when they have to give up any form of worldliness in order to do so, their minds change. These excuses do not cover all the reasons—which are excuses only, and not reasons—for refusing the feast. But they suggest that by far the most common is some form or other of preferring the poor delights of time and sense, and they prepare the way for the stringent requirements, in verse 26, of giving up all to be a disciple.

When the blessings only which Christ brings are in men's view, there are few but will say that they would gladly have them; but when the compliance with the invitation is discovered to mean putting all worldly treasures and joys second, then a sad majority joins in the chorus, "I pray thee have me excused." There was no real incompatibility between the true enjoyment of farm, merchandise, or wife, and accepting the invitation; nor is there any between discipleship and the fullest use and truest enjoyment of earthly good; but the incompatibility is made by our false estimate of these. Because we put them first, therefore they shut us out from the feast. Put it first, and it does not shut us out from them.

In so far as the parable has a historical application, these refusers must be interpreted as primarily meaning the official and ruling part of the nation, such as would supply the guests at the feast where Jesus was sitting. But the historical bearing, however plain, is not the only, nor even the main, purpose of the parable; and these three men

mean all who to-day hold the world so tightly to their hearts that they have no care for God's great banquet of immortal and all-satisfying delights.

III. We have, next, the needy who do not refuse. The first half of the parable completes the unmasking of the true attitude of the class represented by that speaker of hollow cant. Our Lord goes on to describe those who do come to the feast. The servant's telling "his lord these things" is not to be pressed, though Bengel makes good use of it in saying that ministers (and teachers) should bring their failures to God in prayer.

But we may note two points,—the action of the giver of the feast, and the success of the second invitation. The settled purpose of the feast-giver, that some shall partake of it, is not to be foiled. "Shall their unbelief make the faith of God of none effect?" God's provision shall not be wasted, and if it be refused by some foolish souls who prefer husks to bread, and leeks and garlic to manna, the tables shall not stand without guests. The Divine mercy is not to be thwarted, but with persistent variation of direction works on to its end undiscouraged.

True, the structure of the parable required the second invitation to appear as an afterthought; but that does not detract from the wonderful representation it gives of the inexhaustible patience and unwearied continuous invitation of the master of the feast. True, He is "angry," and His offers pass from those who refuse them, as all history shows. The grace of God is like a flying rain-cloud, which falls on many lands. Judæa had it, and lost it. Asia Minor had it, and the crescent is planted where the apocalyptic churches once sparkled as stars in Christ's hand. Let us beware lest, neglected, it pass from us.

But note, further, how the second offer sped. The recipients are still in the "city." They are the same classes as

Jesus had just bid His hearers ask to their feasts (ver. 13). They have no farm or oxen to see after. In the historical application, they represent the "publicans and harlots," the outcast classes who hung on to the theocracy, but, though Israelites by descent, were scouted by the class to whom Jesus was speaking.

In the wider reference, they are the people who know their own needs, and have found themselves to be hungry and poor, having infinite need of salvation, and nothing of their own to win it with. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come, . . . and he that hath no money," is the cry of the servants to such, and it is not refused. Hungry men do not need to be asked twice to a meal. Lame and blind, they could not "go" to prove oxen or to "see" farms, if they had had them; but they could be "brought" by the servants, and hobble and grope their way somehow to the banqueting-hall.

The sense of need and of impotence to supply my need must precede my acceptance of the invitation to the feast, and is often kindled by the invitation. If we know the hunger of the soul, and have some glimpse of the abundance of God's table, we shall not let the world in any form come between us and the feast.

"Yet there is room." How that hints of the boundless spaces in the festal halls, of the ample provision for all, of the wide-open heart of God, which holds us all in one little corner!

IV. We have next the invitation extended to a lower and wider class, and made more urgent, in order to fulfil the host's hospitable desire. The vagrants who house in the fields and under the hedges are farther down in misery than the poor in the city. Historically they represent the Gentiles outside the polity of Israel; and it is in accordance with the spirit of Luke's Gospel that this transference of the

offer of salvation to them should have been recorded by him. But the representation embodies in the most striking and plain way the great truth of which that transference was but an exemplification; namely, the destination of the gospel for all, and its special mission to the lowest.

The increase in urgency corresponds to the distance from the banquet and the degradation of the invited. First the message was a simple "Come;" then it was to be a "bring" them in; and now it is "constrain them." The pleading earnestness increases with the need and the sense of unfitness for so great honour. Complacent indifference, which made sure of a right to eat bread in the kingdom, and would give up nothing for it, was left alone; but poor wretches, who could scarcely believe that the feast was meant for them, were prayed "with much entreaty" to "receive the gift."

How grand and wonderful a view of the Divine longing to bestow blessings lies in that word, given as the motive for the host's command "that my house may be filled"! God cannot be satisfied with empty places at His table. He does not rest till all the ample spaces are crowded with the "great multitude, which no man could number," so all-embracing is His love, so strong His desire to impart the bread, enough and to spare, which He has prepared for all the hungry.

The closing threat is most naturally taken as the host's, not as Christ's. Historically, it foretells the exclusion of the Israel of that day as a whole from the feast; but it does not necessarily imply that individuals who separated themselves from the mass, and changed refusal into acceptance, should be debarred access to it. No threatenings are unconditional, and no refusal need be final. Acceptance is always possible, and nothing but final refusal will be the ground of final exclusion from the "feast of fat things" for all people, to which each of us is invited and may come, however often we have said, "I pray thee have me excused."

LESSON XXVIII.

The Loss, the Seeking, the Joy.

St. Luke xv. 1-10.

1. "Then drew near unto Him all the publicans and sinners for to hear Him.

2. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.

3. And He spake this parable unto them, saying.

4. What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?

5. And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing.

6. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.

7. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.

8. Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it?

9. And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost.

10. Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

LUKE significantly attaches the statement of the flocking of the outcasts to Jesus to the stringent demands for self-denial in order to discipleship. Such severe terms drew even the worst; for they met an echo in their own consciences, and were evidently the requirements of love, which repelled in order to attract. The characteristic taunt of the Pharisees, that Jesus not only welcomed

sinners, but ate with them, is, like all the murmurs of His enemies, a witness to His glory, and a proof of their incapacity to see it. The highest purity is nearer to the foulest sin than to supercilious self-complacency. The foulest sin is drawn by the highest purity when blended with love, as it always is, but is repelled by conventional, unloving morality.

These three wonderful parables are our Lord's defence of His seeking the outcasts and also His rebuke of the unsympathetic cavillers. The two included in this lesson cover the same ground, but with slight and significant differences. We shall best gather their force by considering them together. They have three points in common,—the loss, the seeking, and the joy.

I. They set forth the condition of the classes whom the Pharisees scorned and Christ sought, under the two emblems of the lost sheep, and the lost coin. Note, first, what is common to both. Both have an owner. All men belong to God, and continue His even when they sin. But sin so alters the sinner's relation to God, that God loses him thereby. We are accustomed to speak of men losing their own souls by sin, but here is a yet more solemn thought,—that God loses them, while yet they remain His. The bond of ownership woven by the fact of creation and preservation cannot be broken, "All souls are mine." But the Infinite Love counts no soul truly His which is not knit to Him by the tender tie of answering love and willing submission.

It sounds hard to talk of the Divine efforts to reclaim men as the efforts of an owner to get back his property; but underneath the representation lies the yearning Divine love which calls no man truly its own till it has won his heart. But the parables require that the owner should be the seeker; and the seeker is Jesus. So He distinctly

claims here to be Divine, in that the wanderers belong to Him; and the claim is all the more striking that it is implied rather than asserted. How continual and clear must His consciousness of His Divine nature and His relationship to men have been, when it is thus assumed as the foundation of His defence of Himself for associating with sinners!

Note the differences in the emblems. They differ in relative value. A sheep is worth much more than a "drachma," which was equal to only about fifteen cents, or sixpence. The shepherd has a fairly large flock, the woman a very small purse. He loses one per cent. of his property, but she ten per cent. The lesson is, that the difference of value does not affect the eagerness of effort to recover the lost.

Our Lord would take the Pharisees on their own ground, and show them that even if these poor publicans and sinners were worth as little as they, in their heartless contempt, estimated, they were worth seeking. If property is lost, no matter what its value may be, the owner will spend time and pains in finding it. A man is better than a sheep or a sixpence. God owns "the cattle upon a thousand hills," and all wealth is His, but He will seek His lost property as sedulously as if He had but a poor ten coins, and one of them went astray.

Note the differences in the process of loss. The sheep wanders away heedlessly, not of set purpose, but drawn onward by one tuft of sweet herbage after another, till it has got out of sight of the flock and hearing of the shepherd. So many men stray away from God and Christ, not deliberately, or saying to themselves, "We will depart from the right path," but simply because they follow inclination and the desires of the flesh,—go where the grass is sweetest and walking easiest, and never know where they are till they look round and find themselves lost. The coin, on the

other hand, rolls away by mere gravitation, without volition; and many men fall into dark corners of sin almost as mechanically. But under both the careless straying of the sheep and the mechanical rolling away of the "drachma" lies the selfishness and unbridled living of the prodigal. All three parables must be taken together. Jesus does not weakly excuse sin as the result of circumstances or ignorance, but He points to these as elements in it, and as explaining the mercifulness of His judgment and the tenderness of His efforts.

II. The second point common to both parables is the seeking. The first parable is the principal one in this respect, and the differences seem rather to arise from the nature of the emblems than to be intended to be pressed. What is common to both is the persevering search "until he" or "she find it." Lost things are more important to the owner than unlost. They may be of small intrinsic value, but their being lost draws His thought and care to them; and, wonderful as it is, that principle applies to God, and determines the flow of His solicitude and of the efforts of His Divine Son. Of course, the ninety-nine unstrayed sheep are the Pharisees, taken at their own valuation. The parable is, in effect, "You need not murmur; for, on your own showing, you are like the sheep that have not wandered, and therefore require the Shepherd's care less than these outcasts."

Observe that both parables imply the need for a process of search, in which the owner has to expend labour and thought. Creation needs but the utterance of the Divine will. There "He spake, and it was done." But redemption cannot be effected on such effortless terms. The shepherd has to "go after that which is lost," the housewife to "seek diligently till she find it." The restoration of a soul costs the owner something. The perseverance of the

Divine search, as manifested to us in Christ, is beautifully expressed by that repeated phrase. Not till the lost is found can He cease to put forth efforts. His love beareth all things, hopeth all things. Rejected once and again, it still lingers near us, beseeching us with much entreaty to receive the gift it brings. No distance is too great for it to traverse, no sin so dark but the rays of that kindled love will pierce it. We never get beyond the reach of His grace, and Christ does not say of any man, "I will seek him no more." But the version of the first parable in Matthew (Matt. xviii. 12, 13) says, "If so be that he find,"—a variation which embodies the truth that even the patient efforts of Christ's love may be thwarted by man's awful power of turning a deaf ear to His call.

May we not venture to see a reference to the Incarnation in the shepherd's "going after" the lost sheep? The whole sum of our Lord's loving following of the wanderers with all the manifold varieties of His gracious pleadings, is indeed condensed into that one picture; but perhaps the foundation of them all, in His leaving His throne and coming into the world, is in His thoughts, and hinted at in His words. Widely different from the shepherd's toilsome search over moor and fell is the woman's in her narrow house. The vivid description seems to have no specific lesson.

Meanings have been found for the lamp and the sweeping, but they are precarious; and we shall be wise to content ourselves with the general idea of sedulous care, which stoops to menial offices, and shines into dusty corners. The same love, which travels far afield, and wearies not, will bow itself to lowly service in the narrowest sphere.

The second parable could not have anything corresponding to the beautiful touch in the first, of the shepherd's carrying the sheep on "his own shoulders." When the

coin is found, it is found, and there is an end. But the poor lost sheep has to be brought back somehow, and it is too much exhausted to retrace its steps. It gets no blows nor rebukes, but is tenderly lifted and carried. "He giveth power to the faint; and to him that hath no might He increaseth strength." Jesus gives grace for the weary path of return. As St. Bernard somewhere says, "Christ's yoke is a burden which carries him who carries it."

III. The summons to joy in the owner's joy. Thus far Christ has been on the defensive, vindicating His passing by the Pharisees and resorting to the sinners. Now He assumes the offensive, and rebukes them for their heartless want of sympathy with the Divine joy of restoring the lost. He adds the interpretation to this feature of the parables, from which we learn that He means the angels by the "friends and neighbours." If so, what a sigh of almost longing is audible in that "when He cometh home"! He looks away from the unsympathetic earth, where were none to share His joy, to the heaven whence He came, and stays Himself in His weary search with the thought of the eager sympathy in the sinless and immortal bosoms there.

The broad truths here are two. First, God rejoices over returning sinners, and that just because they were once lost. We need not be afraid of attributing to Him something corresponding to the special pleasure which we know on the recovery of lost things. Unless Christ had thus spoken, we should not have ventured thus to think; but He has thus spoken, and the truest reverence is to accept, with lowly wonder, this revelation of a love which draws so near ours, and deigns to express its depth in such a fashion. A God who can rejoice is a wonderful thought. A God who does rejoice when wanderers are brought back is more wonderful still. Christ as man is glad when men return to

Him; as God, He is glad with a deeper and more awful joy.

The second truth is that God delights to have the inhabitants of heaven share in His gladness. The shepherd and the woman needed to find vent for their joy, and companions in it. Jesus, too, hungered for like sympathy in His many hours of seeking and His few moments of finding. And He bids us look still higher, and believe that God wills that His joy should flow into all the pure hearts round His throne. What a conception of heaven, that the blessedness of the blessed God shines on and is reflected from all!

But Christ draws a comparison here. The joy over the returning sinner is greater than over those who never wandered. Two difficulties arise: First, are there any "righteous persons which need no repentance"? To this it may be sufficient to answer, that the whole parable takes the Pharisees at their own price, and argues that, on their own ground, Christ's conduct is vindicated. This final reference to them simply keeps true to the tenor of the rest. Second, should there be more joy over the restoration of the lost than over the steadfast unlost?

To this it may be sufficient to answer, that so it is always among ourselves, and that such greater joy implies no depreciation of the unfallen, but only tender regard for the fallen. Note, too, that the comparison is absent from the second parable, probably because its presence would rather weaken than strengthen the closing words. "Ninety and nine" is sufficiently indefinite to stand in such a connection, but "nine" would sound poor and almost ludicrous.

Our Lord does not express the lesson which He desired these murmurers to draw. It is, however, obvious enough. They should have been sympathising with Him in His painful toil and in His joy, if they were really beyond its need for themselves. God, all angels, and Christ, are knit

together in common care for the lost and common joy over the restored. If we have part or lot in the temper which fills heavenly bosoms, we, too, shall recognise that the special work of Christ and of His servants is to seek the wanderers, and we shall know the thrill of the heavenly gladness that expands immortal hearts, when any such is found and brought back.

LESSON XXIX.

Departure and Return.

St. Luke xv. 11-24.

11. "And He said, A certain man had two sons:

12. And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.

13. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.

14. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want.

15. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.

16. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him.

17. And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!

18. I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee,

19. And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.

20. And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.

21. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.

22. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet:

23. And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry:

24. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry."

LOST things are precious, and are sought, and the owner is naturally glad when he finds them, and his friends will rejoice with him. These were the lessons of

the preceding parables, by which Jesus vindicated His seeking sinners, and rebuked the murmuring Pharisees. This pearl of the parables, which has sunk deep into the heart of the world, surpasses these others both in tenderness and severity. It brings the element of responsibility into the conception of "lost," and consequently that of return rather than of search into the idea of "found." It thus comes closer to human experience, and the prodigal is in some sense a commentary on the sheep and the "drachma." Ninety-nine sheep or nine coins could not rejoice; "neighbours and friends" had to do that. But one of two brothers might surely be expected to be glad, with the father of both, at the return of the other. The unsympathetic Pharisees are rebuked more sharply than before, and, though our lesson stops short of that part of the parable, it must be kept in mind.

I. We note the stages in the prodigal's departure. The sheep was lost by inadvertent straying after sweet herbage or the like, without intent to leave the flock; the coin rolled away mechanically. Both similes cover a real part of the ground in explanation of the sin of the publicans and harlots, but neither goes to the root. Nothing but itself can be the parallel of that awful mystery and unique fact of alienation of heart and will from a loving Father God. The son's leaving his father's house is more than parable; it is fact. And there is no other kind of being "lost" which can adequately set forth the irrational perversity and the profound misery of such loss.

The first step in departure is the desire to possess his portion as his own, without control or restriction. The root of all sin is selfishness. The son demands rather than requests. He thinks that he is within his rights, and there is not only an absence of all sense of obligation in his brusque words, but almost a tone of resentment, as if he had been

ill-used and cheated out of his rights. So many of us think that we are hardly dealt with if we have to use God's gifts as stewards, and as under law, and want to be set free to do as we like. The desire for independence, and the determination to hold faculties, desires, and possessions, as my own, to be used as I choose, and not as God commands, is the beginning of all evil. He who demands his "rights" in that fashion is a rebel in heart.

The insolent demand is granted without remonstrance. Men who want to live without recognition of Divine authority are allowed to do so. The goods are received without a word of thanks; and then comes the second step,—the son goes into a "far country." In the geography of heaven distance is not reckoned by miles, but by morals and feelings. He is far from God who does not think of Him, nor love and serve Him. He is not far from every one of us, but we are far from Him when we forget Him. The selfish resolve to have our lives ordered for our own delight, and after our own fashion, necessarily puts a gulf between us and God, and that leads on to the final step in departure, riotous living, which wastes the substance.

The publicans and harlots did that, literally; but not only they. All life which is founded on self, and lived far away from God, is "riotous," however outwardly moral and orderly it may be. It has broken the fundamental laws. Such life is always "waste;" for all use of anything that is in any sense ours, whether it be wealth, or talents, or circumstances, which does not use it for God, wastes it. No satisfying result comes to the doer from all the activities of a godless life; and when one considers the possibilities before every soul, and the actual fruits that men really reap from years of toil and struggle, what verdict but "wasted" can be passed upon thousands of lives which the world thinks well spent?

II. Note the stages of suffering. The prodigal's father does not seek his son, as the shepherd and the woman did. The reality of the case shadowed by the parables required that the voluntary departure and voluntary return of the son should be made emphatic; and both sides of the truth have to be taken in order to complete the view. God does seek, but men have to come back. The lost is found when both things take place. But what comes in the place of the seeking in this parable? The prodigal's suffering and hunger.

Are not the sad consequences of a godless life, its unrest and hunger of heart, appointed by God, in His infinite mercy, that these may drive wanderers to His breast? And may we not therefore say that the Father seeks His poor prodigal children by all the pains and weariness, the famine and rags, which are their fate in the far-off land? Verses 14-16 give the tragedy of a soul which has sought its good in separation from God. For a little while there is apparent enjoyment; but the desires, fed by indulgence, outlast the capacity of satisfying them, and a time comes when the outer world is "flat, stale, and unprofitable." That land is a famine-stricken land, and only the new-comers fail at first to find out its hideous barrenness. But the glamour soon passes, and they find that they have nourished fierce cravings which they cannot appease.

The money is spent, but has only purchased "that which is not bread." Then comes a deeper plunge into degradation and slavery. The passions or tastes of the godless man become his masters, and he who kicked at the loving rule of a father falls under the cruel yoke of some "citizen of that country." We must be either sons of God or slaves of the world. But there is no satisfaction in the grosser forms of sin to which the prodigal is ever likely to gravitate. The swine's husks are not man's food, or, if under stress

of famine they be eaten, they do not nourish. Animal delights are not enough to feed the soul. Thus, hungry, enslaved, and desperately trying to end what he needs in gross pleasures, the prodigal is learning how bitter, as well as how evil, a thing it is to leave his father.

But one more drop of bitterness is yet to be added to his cup,—in the heartless indifference of all to his hunger. The companions of revels desert him when the table is bare. The world has little compassion, and even less capacity, to feed a soul smitten with the hunger which only God can still. For surface needs it has both pity and help; but when once that craving after the true bread of God has been excited, it turns away, half amused, half contemptuous, and wholly unable to help. Are not these sorrows, dogging sins, the Father's seeking His child? The sheep may be carried back, and must be sought; the coin may be put into the purse, and must be sought; but the son who chose to go away must choose to come back, and the seeking of him must be the bringing motives to bear which will sway his will.

III. So we have next the stages of return. It is no part of the purpose of the parable to give a complete picture of the soul's return to God, any more than of the whole Divine provision for salvation. The joy over the returning wanderer, and the condemnation of the grudging reluctance of the Pharisees under the type of the sulky elder brother, are the themes, not the full disclosure of, the way of salvation. But though the picture is not all here, what is here is much. "He came to himself." Wandering from God and seeking satisfying good elsewhere is insanity. The prodigal is the victim of illusions and delusions as well as the slave of evil, and is to be pitied as foolish as well as blamed as sinful. If he saw things as they are, and was master of himself, he would go home again. The fairy gold is only a

handful of faded leaves, and the bewitched victim sees it as it is in the morning.

Bitter experience disenchants us of many dreams, and most of us need it to convince us how empty the world is. The first step in the new sanity is the remembrance of the liberal housekeeping at home, and the keen sense of present misery and hunger. The impulse to return in order to get enough to eat is not very elevated, nor is there any love in it; but God does not disdain to welcome us, though we are but driven to Him by despair and hunger. The consciousness of need which shatters the dreams of earthly good is often the beginning of true return to God. We need not spend time in discussing who the hired servants are. They have no significance for the great lessons of the parable. Colonel Gardiner, when conviction began to work in him, envied a dog; and many a man who has found out that swine's husks are not a man's food, has felt a pang when he has seen a world full of happy creatures, and himself the only unsatisfied creature among them. Be that as it may, the main point is the clear feeling of want. Then follows a great resolution, rising out of the sea of troubled thoughts like the moon from a stormy ocean.

Pride and self-will are crucified when the wanderer determines to go back. He set out so light-heartedly, so ungratefully, and now he has to reappear a beggar, and own that he is a fool. It is a bitter pill, but what will not a man do for his life? There is a wide gulf between the sense of want and the fixed purpose of return, and nobody crosses it unless he flings all his self-complacency and self-reliance in, to make a bridge over it. The return would say more forcibly than words "I have sinned," but the resolve embraces confession and also petition. Note that the rehearsed speech begins with "father," the name long forgotten, deeply sinned against, but remembered at last as

an all-prevailing plea. Further, note the self-abasement. He had not cared, and now he does not care, to call himself son; he is more a son when he fears to call himself one that ever before. Dawning trust in the father, deep self-abasement, the beginning of contrition, and lowly pleading for mercy of which he is unworthy, are his feelings. They are those of every true penitent.

But there is a yet wider gulf between this and the decisive step; and nothing is of any profit to the prodigal unless resolve ripens into act. So the last step is that he actually does do what he determined to do, and goes. Many a soul is "lost" because it lets resolution stand for action. None are "found" but those whose action fully carries out their resolution.

IV. We have the exuberant welcome. Surely the representation that the father is passive till he sees the son returning should be sufficient to show that we have here no complete view, and should explain the other omission of reference to the sacrifice which is needed for man's salvation. The seeking love of God has been set forth in the preceding parables. Here the emphasis was to be laid on the voluntary return of the lost.

There are three points marked in these pathetic verses. First, they give us the father's welcome. The eyes of love see far, and many a time the old man had wistfully gazed into the distance, hoping to see what now he saw, the far-off figure which he alone recognises. A father's heart has long since forgiven, and now leaps across the space between, in pity that has no taint of anger to foul its purity. Nor will he sit as if he did not know who was coming, and make him travel the last yard of the bitter road before he lifts the burden from him, but goes to meet him with haste that is itself pardon and welcome, and, clasping him to his heart, asks no confessions, but stops his mouth with kisses which

give all ere it is sought. "Lo, this is our God," seeking us by sorrows, and glad at our return, and ready to wipe out all bitter memories by the embrace of His love.

The son's confession comes next. But with his father's kiss on his lips, he could not ask to be made like the servants. The purposed acknowledgment remains,—for pardon deepens the sense of sin, the consciousness of unworthiness remains, but does not overcloud the assurance that he is a son; and so his unfinished speech witnesses his completed faith and reception of perfect fatherly love.

The preparations for the feast finish our lesson. The dress for the prodigal betokens not only the repair of the ravages of riot and travel, but his reception as an honoured guest. It teaches the great truth that souls forgiven and restored are capable of and obtain higher place in God's house than unfallen spirits, and that the publicans and harlots may take rank there before Pharisees and respectable people. We can scarcely help remembering the familiar emblem of "the robe of righteousness" which Christ clothes us with, though probably that was not intended by the picture.

The feast comes into view not so much as describing the abundance which the prodigal exchanges for his hunger, as the joy in all the father's house at his return. It thus brings the parable again into line with the preceding, and carries the same wonderful thought of real gladness in the heart of God and of all His servants, whether they stand around the throne as ministering spirits to His poor prodigals, who are heirs of salvation, or whether they here on earth live near Him in obedience, and catch sympathy with His fatherly heart. All true sons are glad when the father is glad. All true brothers are glad when the lost brother is found.

LESSON XXX.

Abused Wealth the Rich Man's Ruin.

ST. LUKE xvi. 19-31.

19. "There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day:

20. And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores.

21. And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores,

22. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried.

23. And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

24. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.

25. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.

26. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence.

27. Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house:

28. For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.

29. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.

30. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.

31. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."

THE parable of the unjust steward teaches the right use of worldly wealth; and the central point of the miscellaneous sayings in verses 14-18 is the permanence of

the Law and Prophets. Both points reappear in this solemn imaginary narrative, which is not a parable strictly so called, but a story constructed to embody weighty truth in concrete examples.

I. Note the earthly contrast of the two lives. There is a double contrast,—the sharp and shocking diversity between the prodigal abundance of the rich man's dress and fare and the squalid misery of the diseased beggar, and the contrast between the endings of the two lives. With regard to the first, it is to be clearly understood that Jesus Christ is not running a tilt against rich men, as if wealth was wickedness, or a beggar necessarily a saint. But it should be as clearly noted that He is declaring the essential wickedness and inhumanity which dogs the possession of wealth, as a constant danger; namely, the use of it for selfish purposes, so as to preserve in all its sharpness the contrast between its possessor and the poor. The rich man in the story is not represented as a monster, but his crime was that he had fine clothes for himself, and a table groaning with good things; while, if he had gone to his window, he would have seen a naked beggar lying at his gate, starving. His duty to Lazarus was not discharged by letting him have the leavings of his feasts, as he seems to have done. Rich men may do small charities, and yet be guilty of such use of their wealth as will sink them to ruin. Lazarus was an incarnate opportunity for beneficence. His presence at the gate took away every excuse for the rich man's negligence, and therefore he was an incarnate indictment.

Why does our Lord give this beggar alone, of all the characters in His parables, a name? And why does He choose the name of Lazarus? The reason seems to be, that He desired to suggest, and yet not to bring into great prominence, the thought of the poor man's devoutness.

The name, probably, is equivalent to the full form "Eleazar," which means, "God is help," and it hints that the helpless outcast had anchored his hope on God. That hint is needed in order to account for his being found in "Abraham's bosom"; and yet His piety is not to be too emphatically signalised in the early part of the story, lest it should seem as if our Lord was teaching that the obligation on the rich was only to relieve the pious poor. Not because he was Lazarus, who trusted in the help of God, but because he was in such evil case, poor and leprous, was it the rich man's business to help him.

Conservative commentators take great pains to point out that Christ is not condemning rich men as rich. But, while that is true, there is need for strongly insisting that He is condemning a fearfully common misuse of wealth. What would Jesus Christ say to the violent contrasts in modern life between wealth and poverty? Has this parable no message of sharp rebuke to men who to-day lavish money on fine houses, pictures, foreign travel, and the like, and never lift a finger to help the misery in the slums, where foul blood corrupts almost within sight of their back doors, if not of their front ones? Christ's teaching about wealth is not communist or socialist. He recognises fully the right of individual possession; but He emphatically asserts that possession is stewardship, and that we hold money, as we do everything, in trust for those who lack and need it. The belief and practice of that would revolutionise society, and we should have no more rich men dying, like this one, in the odour of sanctity, and renowned for their liberality to the cause of God and men, while leaving behind them millions.

That brings us to notice the contrasted deaths. Lazarus dies first, worn out by privation and disease. Perhaps, if he had been carried indoors from the gate, he would have lasted longer. What a change for him! The one moment

lying in the fierce sunshine, so motionless and helpless that the dogs came about him as if he were dead, and he had no strength to drive them away; "A second, and the angels alter that." He has no funeral, as the other has. Probably his corpse is flung into some hastily-cut trench and forgotten. The rich man dies, and, of course, has a splendid interment, with all the proper pomp and circumstance. His wealth can get him a fine funeral, of which he knows nothing; and that is all that it can do. "He shall carry nothing away; his glory shall not descend after him."

II. Note the reversed contrast of the two lives in Hades. We cannot but recognise here that our Lord paints that unseen state in colours taken from the ordinary Jewish conceptions. "Abraham's bosom," the bearing of the soul by angels, the dialogues between the dead, were all familiar rabbinical ideas. We have so little other revelation with which to compare these thoughts, that it is difficult to determine how far they are meant as representations of fact; and any doctrinal conclusions drawn from this narrative must be held doubtful, unless confirmed by other Scripture. The main idea seems to be that of the reversal, in Hades, of the earthly condition. Lazarus is now in the place of joy and abundance; the rich man is now the beggar lying at the gate. The same relative position is continued in that dim world, only the parts are reversed. He who would give nothing of his abundance, but was deaf to the groans, and blind to the misery at his gate, has now to feel the pangs of need and to crave a drop of water to cool his tongue. The soul that has lived for earth only, will find its long-pampered, sensuous desires turned to torment, when the opportunity of gratifying them is ended. What can a man, who has cared only to gratify his senses do when he has no body and no contact with the material world? Thirst far worse than that of the parched throat must be his.

The solemn answer put into the lips of Abraham may not represent real communications between the two halves of Hades as possible; but, at all events, it expresses the impossibility, from the very nature of that state, of granting the desired alleviation. It is a state of retribution, the outgrowth and necessary issue of the earthly life, and so cannot be otherwise than it is. "Remember." The past will stand clear before the selfish man, and be a torment. "Thy good things." He who makes the world his good is necessarily wretched when he is swept out of it by the whirlwind of death, and sees when too late what a blunder his estimate of its good was. On the other hand, the pious beggar received things that were "evil." in reality, but yet were not the things which he regarded as truly evil; and because he, on his part, placed his good higher than the world, therefore evil wrought for good to him. He made God his help, and so he is comforted; while the rich man, not as rich, but as trusting in riches and misusing them to nourish desires which can no more be gratified, is tormented by the very desires he has so nourished, and by the stings of conscience and memory.

The lesson of this parable is the converse of that of the unjust steward; namely, that the selfish use of wealth is fatal, and brings bitter retribution in another life. Our modern Christianity is far too chary in giving full weight and prominence to our Lord's plain and reiterated teachings to that effect. It needs to be preached more emphatically, and to be burned into men's consciences. This intensely practical lesson is the purpose of the whole, rather than the disclosure of the mysteries of the dim regions beyond the grave.

The second ground for the refusal of the request is the existence of the "great gulf," which forbids passage from either side. The undeniable presence, in the narrative, of

features accommodated to the popular conceptions prevents our arguing from that representation, as if it were a plain doctrinal statement. But while admitting this, we cannot but see that, on the other hand, there is no hint of repentance in the rich man's cry, and that the implication of the whole is that his character was set. True, the state of Hades is not a final state ; but it is also true that the narrative gives no reason for holding that the character of its inhabitants is anything but permanent.

III. Note the sufficient warnings by Law and Prophets The rich man's second petition has often been treated as a sign that his selfishness was melting, and that so he was on the road to a better mind. But the natural instinct of family is not in itself more than selfishness elongated ; and his request implies that he thinks the fault of his being where he is, lies not at his door, but is due to imperfect warnings. That does not sound like repentance. "If I had had a message from the grave, I would have repented." So many of us think that it is God's fault, not ours, that we yield to temptation. But the real ground of our sinful, godless lives is not deficiency of light and warning, but inward aversion. Every man has far more knowledge of good than he uses. It is not for lack either of warning or of conviction that men are lost. They do not need enlightenment, but, as Christ significantly puts it here, "persuasion." If Lazarus had gone to the five brethren, the likelihood is that they would have scoffed at his assertion that he had risen, or, after a little wonderment, would have let his words pass unheeded.

The Pharisees, whom Christ is pointing at here, were giving signal proof of the power of neglecting miraculous evidence, even while, like the rich man, they were calling out for it from Jesus, This latter portion of the parable is directed against them, and completes the reference of the

whole to the preceding part of the chapter. The first part echoes the lesson of the unjust steward; this repeats the assertion of the permanent validity of Law and Prophets. But though directed primarily against the Pharisees, both have their lesson for us. We have knowledge and motive enough to walk in the paths of Godliness. If we do not give heed to what we have, it would be vain to send even messengers from the dead to us. What is lacking in us, if we do not yield to the light, is not more light, but eyes to see, and a heart to love it.

LESSON XXXI

Gratitude and Ingratitude.

St. Luke xvii. 11-19.

11. "And it came to pass, as He went to Jerusalem, that He passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee.

12. And as He entered into a certain village, there met Him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off:

13. And they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.

14. And when He saw them, He said unto them, Go shew yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed.

15. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God,

16. And fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks: and he was a Samaritan.

17. And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine?

18. There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger.

19. And He said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole."

IN verse 11, the Revised Version's marginal rendering "between" is to be preferred. If we read "through the midst of," why is Samaria, which is south of Galilee, named first? If Jesus travelled eastwards to the fords of the Jordan on His way to Jerusalem, along the borders of the two territories, He would have Samaria on His right and Galilee on His left, and the order of naming them is natural. His purpose in taking that unusual route may have been to come into contact with Samaritans and Jews simultaneously. At any rate, Luke sees in this passage a symbol of the universal aspect of His mission, as He sheds His beams on both

sides, to the Samaritans on the one hand and the Galileans on the other. This admission of the heathen to the benefits of His love is one of the lessons of the present narrative.

I. We note first the forlorn company and their cry. Misery makes strange companionships. A common wretchedness drove these lepers together, and extinguished national prejudices and animosities, as wild animals, that prey on each other, will huddle together amicably on some little dry place in a flood. May there not also be in this group, whose leprosy united them, irrespective of differences, a hint of the common, sad unity in which common transgression binds all men, Jew or Gentile,—"for there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God"?

They stand afar off, like the publican in the temple, as the law required, and yet not so far but that their hoarse feeble voices (an accompaniment of leprosy) and Christ's gentle words, which we cannot conceive of as shouted, were heard. Their cry indicates no very advanced recognition of His character. They address Him vaguely by His name and a title peculiar to Luke's Gospel, which means much or little, as may happen, and here probably meant very little. But, at all events, they think that He can cure them, and that is all they want of Him. The poorest appeal to His loving pity and power is never in vain. "According to your faith, be it unto you." Low thoughts of Him, low desires after low blessings from Him, limit the possibilities of His gifts, but receive all which can be given, that they may be elevated and enlarged.

II. We note the command which is a promise. The singular form of Christ's answer had, no doubt, appropriateness to the spiritual needs of the lepers, and was mainly determined thereby. How wonderfully various are the ways in which Christ gave healing! He varied His methods that we might learn that He is tied to none. Sometimes He

comes, sometimes He heals from a distance; sometimes by touch, or by material vehicle; sometimes by a bare word; sometimes gradually, and sometimes at one stroke,—but always in the best way for the subject. Here the command tested, and it was hoped would strengthen, faith. It would take a good deal of confidence in Him to set off to the priest, while the leprosy was as foul as ever. It would look a mad errand on which He was sending them. So their going showed that they trusted Him.

They had taken but a few steps, when, lo! they felt health returning, and their flesh came again as the flesh of a little child. What a magnificent manifestation of Christ's power thus to heal at a distance! What a lesson as to His suspending our healing and many another gift on obedience! Often we desire benefits from Him, and seem to get nothing but commands. But, if we obey the commands, we shall surely find unwonted strength stealing into our limbs, and old corruptions relaxing their hold. It was a leper that began to do His bidding; it was a sound man that finished the journey. So it is always. If we would possess Christ's gifts, let us keep His commandments.

III. We note the unthankful nine and the grateful one. Clearly they had not gone far on their way when they felt the cleansing. We cannot suppose that Jesus waited at the place to see what they would do. The nine never so much as turn their heads to say "Thanks." The one Samaritan feels that he must go back to unlade his heart of its thankfulness, first to God and then to Jesus. Luke is especially interested in the fact that he was a Samaritan. He sees in the contrast of the nine Jews and him a type of the Jewish coldness and the heathen joyful faith. One in ten was a small proportion.

Is the percentage of thankfulness higher among us? Surely the sin of ingratitude is all but universal. It has

many causes and forms. We are ungrateful because we are so taken up with the gifts that we have no thoughts to spare for the giver, like dogs with a bone, or beggars who never heed the giving hand, but only the alms. We are ungrateful because we take God's gift as a matter of course. It has always been ours, it comes unbrokenly; and so, by His very assiduity, He loses our admiration and thankfulness. We glide along the continuous line of rail, and never think how much we owe it. If a length or so of the track were pulled up, we should understand better. So sickness teaches the worth of health, and we are most aware of our blessings when they are gone. The sitting bird looks dull and brown, but its bright plumage shows as it takes its flight. We are ungrateful, too, because we trace our blessings to ourselves, and plume ourselves on our talent or business cleverness, our push or perseverance, or industry, or what not. Some warlike tribes worshipped the sword. We all burn incense to our own net, and rob God of praise by attributing success to ourselves.

Some of us are ungrateful, because we lose the sense of our many mercies if we have a single sorrow. One little cloud will hide a sky full of blue. One barked and dead tree is more conspicuous than a forest, green and waving in full-foliaged beauty. The saddest example of ingratitude is the poverty of the thankfulness of those who are, in some measure, thankful for God's greatest gift. It is strange and melancholy that Christians should love, and love so little; should be thankful, and so tepid in it; should exercise some, yet so imperfect, surrender. None at all, or a great deal more, would be intelligible; but such thanks for such a gift as the average Christian brings are surely mysteriously incongruous. Was this all for which Jesus so lavishly expended His infinite love? Truly He sows much and reaps little. "What could have been done more to My vineyard,

that I have not done in it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?" Our ordinary gratitude should rather be named ingratitude, so miserably disproportioned is it to its occasion.

IV. We note the wonder, pain, and patience of Jesus. The Revised Version makes all our Lord's words questions, and that brings out still more forcibly the element of wonder in them. His threefold question expresses surprise. As we read elsewhere, He "marvelled" at unbelief and at the centurion's faith, so here He wonders both at the ingratitude of the nine Jews and at the thankfulness of the one Samaritan. Our unthankfulness is the strangest thing in the world. Benefits are wont to melt men. But all Christ's gifts do not avail to win love for Him. Well may the prophet call on the heavens to be "astonished" at such a spectacle. Well may even He, who knew what was in man, be surprised at the depth of alienation which unthankfulness reveals. Does He wonder less at what He sees in us?

There is sadness, too, in His questions. Unthankfulness smites a loving heart like the lash of a whip, or an icy wind blowing on a tropical flower. Never was heart so cut and bruised by it as was Christ's. May it not be that still, amid the glory and joy of heaven, some shadow of the old sadness moves across His love as He sees our coldness? But no trace of anger blends with the pain, nor does He withdraw the blessing. It would have been deserved punishment if the leprosy had come back to the ingrates. But He does not recall His gifts, because they are selfishly enjoyed without thought of Him. If He stripped us of all for which we are not thankful, how naked and shivering we should all stand!

V. We note the larger blessings given to the thankful heart. The faith, which our Lord recognises in the

Samaritan, is something deeper than the confidence in His healing power which the leper had at first, and the effect attributed to it ("hath made thee whole," or "saved thee") is surely something more than bodily cleansing. That is to say, the thankfulness that brought him back was rewarded with deeper insight into Christ's preciousness, and with new gifts of better healing. So it always is. Thankful reception of what we have is the sure way to increase our store. "Unto every one that hath shall be given," and we do not really "have" unless we gladly recognise that we have "received" from Him. Thankfulness brings us closer to Jesus.

The leper stood afar off when he cried for mercy, but he came close to Christ's feet when he thanked Him for it. To be near Jesus is the highest blessing that the due sense of His mercies can bring. It is the parent of all other blessings. To live at His feet, and have our hearts penetrated by the continual consciousness of His working good for us and in us, is the heaven of heaven, and the foretaste of heaven on earth. Thankfulness strengthens faith, which is the condition of receiving all blessings. Experience gives new confidence to trust. The leper's prayer had some dim faith in it, but how much more and clearer faith had his thanks! When we see our past in its true light as one long unbroken display of God's love, it is not difficult to have the calm confidence that "to-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant." Thankfulness for the past melts into faith for the future.

Thankfulness impels to happy consecration and self-surrender, and these are blessings and bring blessings. When, moved by the mercies of God, we yield ourselves to Him in glad surrender, to be His utterly and for ever, we have conquered sorrow, doubt, fear, and all the gloomy shadows that selfishness casts over a life. Nothing is so

blessed as to live in the sweet serenity of a continual sense of God's continual gifts, and, for His dear love's sake, to become living sacrifices. Duty changes its aspect when it becomes the expression of thankfulness. Sorrows change their gloom when they are accepted submissively and thankfully. All life is glorified when the fire of God's love kindles it into a whole burnt offering, "an odour of a sweet savour" to God Himself.

LESSON XXXII.

Persevering and Penitent Prayer.

St. Luke xviii. 1-14.

1. "And He spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;

2. Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man:

3. And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary.

4. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man;

5. Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.

6. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith.

7. And shall not God avenge His own elect, which cry day and night unto Him, though He bear long with them?

8. I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?

9. And He spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:

10. Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.

11. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.

12. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.

13. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.

14. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

THE two parables in this lesson have a certain connection in so far as both deal with prayer; but they do not seem to have been spoken on the same occasion; and in the second of the two prayer comes into view, simply as

the expression of self-righteousness in the one man and of lowly penitence in the other, which are its real subjects It is best, therefore, to consider the two as independent. The one exhorts to perseverance in prayer, especially in regard to the delayed coming of the Son of man. The other exhorts to humble self-distrust, and prayer for pardon.

I. The parable which commends persevering prayer. The difference between it and the other parable which resembles it (that of the importunate friend, Luke xi.) should be kept in view. That taught the general lesson of perseverance in prayer; this deals with perseverance in prayer for a particular thing; namely, the coming of the Son of man for judgment, which has been the theme of the preceding chapter (vers. 20-37), and is recurred to in Christ's question at the end of verse 8. This specialising of the general lesson accounts for the imagery of the parable. We may look first at the story and then at Christ's comment on it.

The judge is one of those, too common always in the East, who poisons the fountain of justice at its source, and is "a companion of thieves." His character is painted in dark colours, and the darker they are the more do they serve to bring out the contrast between him and the Judge to whom Christians have to pray. That contrast is the very point of the parable. So far gone in selfish wresting of His office is this man that he is fully conscious of his own baseness, and does not even attempt the farce of varnishing it, but, with cynical frankness, acknowledges his motives to himself. His delay in granting the widow's petition, and his final yielding, come from the same motive—his own convenience. It was troublesome to do as she wished; but when it became more troublesome not to do it, he did it.

His soliloquy has a dash of humour, if we adopt the

rendering put in the margin of the Revised Version. The woman was pestering him with her tongue, and he half pretends to be afraid that she will take to her fists at last, and "assault me to finish." Probably he did not really fear that, but he puts it in this exaggerated way to express his annoyance with the worrying persistence of the shrill-tongued, determined nuisance who haunted his court.

The judge is meant to be as unlike our Judge as can be conceived. The widow is meant to be like the true disciple. She is the figure of God's "own elect, which cry day and night unto Him;" and that not only in her persistence, but in her desolation. Whether we bring into connection the frequent scriptural emblem of the bride, and think of the state of the Church during her Lord's absence as widowhood, as we should probably do, or content ourselves with the vaguer interpretation, which regards her simply as afflicted and the prey of oppressors, she represents the state of the Church in the absence of the Lord. The Eastern widow has no protectors, and therefore many oppressors; and if she can find no redress from law she is desolate indeed. Her prayer does not breathe so fierce a spirit as "avenge" suggests.

What she asks is deliverance for herself, rather than vengeance on her foe. The deliverance cannot, indeed, be accomplished without retribution on the oppressor, but that is not the primary burden of her prayer.

Note next our Lord's comment. The argument is like that of the parable of the importunate friend, or of the reference to fathers, "being evil," who "know how to give good gifts." It is a "much more." Every point in the description of the unjust judge is to be reversed, and then we shall have the picture of our Judge. He does not delay for His own ease; He is not careless to our sorrows, nor deaf to our prayer. If His judgment seems to slumber, the

delay is the tarrying of love, and is for the good of the Church. When the intervention comes, it will not be wrung from an indifferent hand by fear of being troubled, but be the loving gift of Him who knows when, as well as how, to grant deliverance.

The whole teaches (1) that the Church will have to pass through a period of desolation and oppression which will only end with Christ's coming; (2) that its true attitude during that time should be earnest desire and prayer for that coming; (3) that there will be long delay. That is not only implied by the whole structure of the parable, but seems to be the best interpretation of the somewhat obscure "though He bear long with them," or, as the Revised Version has it, "and He is long-suffering over them." (4) That this delay is not the result of carelessness to the Church's need and cry, and so that no delay should deaden faith or silence entreaty.

Jesus adds further an assurance and a sad question. The assurance is not, as a mere English reader might suppose, that the deliverance is at hand,—which is contradicted by the whole parable,—but that, whensoever it comes, the thing will be done suddenly. The clock hand creeps slowly over the dial during thirty-six hundred tedious ticks, but then comes a whir and a crash. The law of God's judgments is that they travel slowly, but come suddenly at last, and are "a short work."

The final question is really a sad prediction. "But"—notwithstanding the certainty and My assurance of it—"the faith" in His coming (not merely "faith" in the wider sense of the word) will have waxed dim. This closing word at once shows the correctness of the interpretation which gives a special direction to the persevering prayer enjoined, and enforces the exhortation by the consideration of the danger to which the waiting servants are exposed.

II. The parable against self-righteousness. Like several others in Luke's Gospel it is not properly a parable but an illustrative example; the two men not being symbols, but instances, of the sin condemned and the grace commended. Like the preceding parable, this falls into two parts,—the story and Christ's comments.

There is the picture of the two men. They go up to the temple, according to custom, at the hour of prayer, and seem to enter side by side, but they soon part. According to some, we should read, "The Pharisee stood by himself," his isolation being the sign of his self-righteousness; but the ordinary translation is best. Perhaps nobody ever put a "prayer" like this into plain words; but it was what the Pharisee really said "into himself," as the children put it. Whatever he said this was what he thought. Christ is translating into words the disposition condemned, and that is its sufficient condemnation. Men will recognise the sin and folly of their acts and dispositions when these are put into speech. Let us not forget that Christ is always thus translating deeds and hidden feelings; ay, and devoutly phrased prayers, and that many of us would start back from our own pictures with the surprised question, "Is it I?"

Note the characteristics of this self-righteous "prayer." There is a perfectly correct form of devotion. The proper attitude of public prayer was standing. But how cool and free from all "excessive fervour" his devotion is! He says "God," of course, but that name opens no fountain of love in him. He says, "I thank thee," but that is conventional, and counts for next to nothing. Where there is no sense of sin there is no glow of thankful love, and the worship of self-righteous people is punctiliously proper and utterly dead. There is arrogant uncharitableness. So cool was he that he had leisure to look about him, while he prayed, and to note the publican and to think of other people. He

seems to divide the human race into two. All "the rest" are sinners; and there is none good but one, that is—himself.

Even if he does not go so far as that, and means by "others" only the base mass, it is bad enough. But self-righteousness can only maintain its pride in self by depreciating others; for, if its measure of goodness be common, it is nothing to plume one's self on. He knew nothing about the publican, but takes his badness for granted. Nor does he think at all of people better than himself, of prophets and saints. Contempt for others and blindness to the beauty of higher goodness than their own is the misery of all conceited people; and, of all conceit, the conceit in reference to moral character is the worst and most hopeless.

Further, there is a very poor, shallow notion of what goodness is. "I am not" so and so. But goodness is not merely negative. No doubt he was truthful in his claim, but what then? Is that poor, starved conception adequate? Probably he had never been tempted to the vices disavowed, but, in any case, he might be free from them all and yet be bad. He goes no deeper than acts, as if these were the only things to be judged. The notion of religion is correspondingly shallow. Bi-weekly fasting and tithing of all profits went far beyond the legal prescriptions, and who could deny his religiousness after that? Yes, and what about dependence, aspiration, trust, enthusiasm, self-surrender, submission? Self-righteous religion includes none of these, and therefore is nought.

The publican's attitude, gesture, and prayer, all express the one feeling which swallowed up all others,—his utter self-abhorrence, leading him to cry to God for mercy. He has no thought of others, or, if any, it is that he surpasses all in transgression, for he calls himself "the sinner.'

We are not to look in any parable for all the truth; and this one says nothing about the objective ground of a sinner's hope, the propitiatory sacrifice. But that is no reason for doubting that the full statement of the way of forgiveness must set Jesus forth as the propitiation. Here our Lord is concerned only with men's estimate of themselves, and the contribution which this parable makes to the whole truth is not to tell us how God is "propitiated," but what disposition brings men within reach of that propitiation and of pardon. "Redemption through His blood" is not its theme, but, forgiveness on condition of penitence. The time was not ripe for the full proclamation of the atonement which was not yet accomplished.

But this is the lesson of the parable, that blindness to our sin makes a barrier against which God's pardoning mercy beats in vain; for it is impossible to give pardon to a man who does not feel that he needs it. But the sense of sin and the cry for mercy ever bring down the sweet sense of forgiveness, as the waters, which make the land fertile, gather in the low valleys, and leave the mountain-tops dry and bare.

LESSON XXXIII.

How to Enter the Kingdom.

ST. LUKE xviii. 15-30.

15. "And they brought unto Him also infants, that He would touch them: but when His disciples saw it, they rebuked them.

16. But Jesus called them unto Him, and said, Suffer little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.

17. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein.

18. And a certain ruler, asked Him, saying, Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?

19. And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? none is good, save One, that is, God.

20. Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother.

21. And he said, all these have I kept from my youth up.

22. Now when Jesus heard these things, He said unto him, Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow Me.

23. And when he heard this, he was very sorrowful: for he was very rich.

24. And when Jesus saw that he was very sorrowful, He said, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!

25. For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

26. And they that heard it said, Who then can be saved?

27. And He said, The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.

28. Then Peter said, Lo, we have left all, and followed thee.

29. And He said unto them, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake,

30. Who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting."

IN this section Luke rejoins the other two evangelists, from whom his narrative has diverged since Luke ix. 51. All three bring together these two incidents of the

children in Christ's arms and the young ruler. Probably they were connected in time as well as in subject. Both set forth the conditions of entering the kingdom, which the one declares to be lowliness and trust, and the other to be self-renunciation.

I. We have the child-likeness of the subjects of the kingdom. No doubt there was a dash of superstition in the impulse that moved the parents to bring their children to Jesus, but it was an eminently natural desire to win a good man's blessing, and one to which every parent's heart will respond. It was not the superstition, but the intrusive familiarity, that provoked the disciples' rebuke. A great man's hangers-on are always more careful of his dignity than he is, for it increases their own importance.

The tender age of the children is to be noted. They were "babes," and had to be brought, being too young to walk, and so having scarcely yet arrived at conscious, voluntary life. It is "of such" that the subjects of the kingdom are composed. What, then, are the qualities which, by this comparison, Jesus requires? Certainly not innocence, which would be to contradict all His teaching, and to shut out the prodigals and publicans, and clean contrary to the whole spirit of Luke's Gospel. Besides, these scarcely conscious infants were not "innocent," for they had not come to the age of which either innocence or guilt can be predicated. What, then, had they which the children of the kingdom must have?

Perhaps the sweet and meek little 131st Psalm puts us best on the track of the answer. It may have been in our Lord's mind; it certainly corresponds to His thought. "My heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty. . . . I have stilled and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with his mother." The infant's lowliness is not yet humility; for it is instinct rather than virtue. It makes no claims; thinks

no lofty thoughts of self; in fact, has scarcely begun to know that there is a self at all. On the other hand, clinging trust is the infant's life. It, too, is rudimentary and instinctive, but the impulse which makes the babe nestle in its mother's bosom may well stand for a picture of the conscious trust which the children of the kingdom must have. The child's instinct is the man's virtue. We have

> "To travel back
> And tread again that ancient track,"

regaining as the conscious temper of our spirits those excellences of humility and trust of which the first faint types may be seen in the infant in arms. The entrance gate is very low, and if we hold our heads high we shall not get through it. It must be on our hands and knees that we go in. There is no place in the kingdom for those who trust in themselves. We must rely wholly on God manifest in His Son.

So intent is Luke in pointing the lesson that he passes by in silence the infinitely beautiful and touching incident which the world perhaps knows better than any other in our Lord's life,—that of His taking the infants in His arms and blessing them. In many ways that incident would have been peculiarly suitable for this Gospel, which delights to bring out the manhood and universal beneficence of Jesus. But if Luke knew of it, he did not care to bring in anything which would weaken the lesson of the conditions of entering the kingdom.

II. We have self-renunciation as the condition of entering the kingdom. The conversation with the ruler sets forth its necessity; the sad exclamation to the bystanders (vers. 24-27) teaches its difficulty; and the dialogue with Peter, as representing the twelve (vers. 28-30), its reward.

(1.) The necessity of self-renunciation. The ruler's ques-

tion has much blended good and evil. It expresses a true earnestness, a dissatisfaction with self, a consciousness of unattained bliss and a longing for it, a felt readiness to take any pains to secure it, a confidence in Christ's guidance,—in short, much of the child spirit. But it has also a too light estimate of what good is, a mistaken notion that "eternal life" can be won by external deeds, which implies fatal error as to its nature and His own power to do these. This superficial estimate of goodness, and this over-confidence in his ability to do good acts, are the twin mistakes against which Christ's treatment of him is directed.

Adopting Luke's version of our Lord's answer, the counter-question, which begins it, lays hold of the polite address, which had slipped from the ruler's lips as mere form, and bids him widen out his conceptions of "good." Jesus does not deny that He has a right to the title, but questions this man's right to give it Him. The ruler thought of Jesus only as a man, and, so thinking, was too ready with his adjective. Conventional phrases of compliment may indicate much of the low notions from which they spring. He who is so liberal with his ascriptions of goodness needs to have his notions of what it is elevated. Jesus lays down the great truth which this man, in his confidence that he, by his own power, could do any good needed for eternal life, was perilously forgetting. God is the only good, and therefore all human goodness must come from Him; and if the ruler is to do "good," he must first be good, by receiving goodness from God.

But the saying has an important bearing on Christ's character. The world calls Him good. Why? There is none good but God. So we are face to face with this dilemma,—Either Jesus Christ is God manifest in the flesh, or He is not good.

Having thus tried to deepen his conceptions, and awaken

his consciousness of imperfection, our Lord meets the man on his own ground by referring him to the Law, which abundantly answered his inquiry. The second half of the commandments are alone quoted by Him; for they have especially to do with conduct, and the infractions of them are more easily recognised than those of the first. The ruler expected that some exceptional and brilliant deeds would be pointed out, and he is relegated to the old homely duties, which it is gross crime not to do.

A shade of disappointment and impatience is in his protestation that he had done all these ever since he was a lad. No doubt he had, and his coming to Jesus confessed that, though he had, the doing had not brought him "eternal life." Are there not many youthful hearts which would have to say the same if they would be frank with themselves? They have some longings after a bliss and calm which they feel is not theirs. They have kept within the lines of that second half of the Decalogue, but that amount and sort of "good thing" has not brought peace. Jesus looks on all such as He did on this young man,—"loves" them, and speaks further to them as He did to him. What was lacking? The soul of goodness, without which these other things were "dead works." And what is that soul? Absolute self-renunciation and following Christ. For this man the former took the shape of parting with his wealth, but that external renunciation in itself was as "dead" and impotent to bring eternal life as all his other good acts had been. It was precious as a means to an end,—the entrance into the number of Christ's disciples; and as an expression of that inward self-surrender which is essential for discipleship.

The real stress of the condition is in its second half, "Follow me." He who enters the company of Christ's followers enters the kingdom, and has eternal life. If he

does not do that, he may give his goods to feed the poor, and it profiteth him nothing. Eternal life is not the external wages for external acts, but the outcome and consequence of yielding self to Jesus, through whom goodness, which keeps the law, flows into the soul.

The requirement pierced to the quick. The man loved the world more than eternal life, after all. But though he went away, he went sorrowful; and that was perhaps the presage that he would come back.

(2.) Jesus follows him with sad yearning, and, we may be sure, still sought to draw him back. His exclamation is full of the charity which makes allowance for temptation. It speaks a universal truth, never more needed than in our days, and in America and England where wealth has flung its golden chains round so many professing Christians. How few of us believe that it gets harder for us to be disciples as we grow richer! There are multitudes in our Churches who would be far nearer Christ than they are ever likely to be, if they would literally obey the injunction to get rid of their wealth.

We are too apt to take such commands as applicable only to the individuals who received them, whereas, though, no doubt, the spirit, and not the letter, is the universal element in them, there are far more of us than we are willing to confess, who need to obey the letter in order to keep the spirit. What a depth of vulgar adoration of the power of money is in the disciples' exclamation, "If rich men cannot get into the kingdom, who can get in?" Or perhaps it rather means, If self-renunciation is the condition, who can fulfil it? The answer points us all to the only power by which we can do good, and overcome self; namely, by God's help. God is "good," and we can be good too, if we look to Him. God will fill our souls with such sweetness that earth will not be hard to part with.

(3.) The last paragraph of this lesson teaches the reward of self-renunciation. Peter shoves his oar in, after his fashion. It would have been better if he had not boasted of their surrender, but yet it was true that they had given up all. Only a fishing-boat and a parcel of old nets, indeed, but these were all they had to give; and God's store, which holds His children's surrendered valuables, has many things of small value in it,—cups of cold water and widows' mites lying side by side with crowns and jewels.

So Jesus does not rebuke the almost innocent self-congratulation, but recognises in it an appeal to his faithfulness. It was really a prayer, though it sounded like a vaunt, and it is answered by renewed assurances. To part with outward things for Christ's sake or for the kingdom's sake,—which is the same thing,—is to win them again with all their sweetness a hundredfold sweeter. Gifts given to Him come back to the giver, mended by His touch and hallowed by lying on His altar. The present world yields its full riches only to the man who surrenders all to Jesus. And the "eternal life," which the ruler thought was to be found by outward deeds, flows necessarily into the heart which is emptied of self, that it may be filled with Him who is the life, and will be perfected yonder.

LESSON XXXIV.

Melted by Kindness.

St. Luke xix. 1-10.

1. "And Jesus entered and passed through Jericho.
2. And, behold, there was a man named Zacchæus, which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich.
3. And he sought to see Jesus who He was; and could not for the press, because he was little of stature.
4. And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycomore tree to see Him: for He was to pass that way.
5. And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchæus, make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house.
6. And he made haste, and came down, and received Him joyfully.
7. And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, That He was gone to be a guest with a man that is a sinner.
8. And Zacchæus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.
9. And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham.
10. For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

THIS visit to Jericho was the last. It was but a few days before Calvary, and the near approach of the end, as well as the tension of concentrated purpose which marked our Lord in these last days, make the delay and effort to win Zacchæus the more striking. He was the last convert, so far as we know, before the cross. The penitent thief was the next.

I. The narrative leads us to note, first, the character and motives of Zacchæus. His name shows his Jewish origin,

and contrasts with his character. It means "pure." A Jew who had taken service with Rome could have little patriotism, and less religion. His work was not of the sort which a noble nature would undertake, and no doubt he had made it uglier than it need have been. His office showed that he cared more for gain than for honour or duty. His motto was, "Money has no smell, from whatever cesspools it may have been fished up." He was rich; but wealth did not buy esteem. A Jew publican was classed with thieves, and regarded as an agent of the enemy, and hated accordingly,—and knew that he was. Italians did not love Italians who served Austria.

The harsh judgments were, no doubt, generally deserved, and, as a rule, they would produce the very vices which they attributed. Brand a class with an evil fame, and its members will become what the world says they are. Bitterness breeds bitterness, and Zacchæus would repay contempt with interest. He obviously kept aloof from popular movements; for he had never seen Jesus, who had often passed through Jericho. He had been too busy with his dishonourable and often dishonest work, to run after this Rabbi that everybody was talking about.

All this is unpromising enough; but, buried below greed and unscrupulousness and bitter animosity, was a little seed, the nature of which the man himself did not apparently recognise. He said to himself that it was curiosity that drew him. Probably he was doing himself injustice. There was something better vaguely stirring in him, which he was afraid to acknowledge to himself, like people on whom the gospel is beginning to take hold, who "only come to see what the meetings are like," and sneak into some dark corner. The fame of Jesus as the friend of publicans had probably reached Zacchæus, and touched him. His determination may set us an example.

The crowd and his short stature were formidable hindrances, but he makes up his mind that see Jesus he will. Where there is a will, there is a way. Difficulties are things to be overcome. In all walks of life they are sown thick, and perhaps thickest on the road to Christ. But on that road they can all be clambered over, or crept under, or got round somehow, and nothing need keep the sight of Jesus from a heart that is in earnest in wishing it.

Zacchæus had been long accustomed to ridicule, and did not mind a jeer or two as he climbed the sycomore. We have often to drop dignity if we want to get high enough above the mob to see the Lord; and a man afraid of being laughed at will stand a poor chance. "Who dares say that sycomores are barren? See one here laden with good fruit." (Fuller.)

II. We note the surprise of Christ's over-answer to Zacchæus' desire. It may be doubtful if our Lord's looking up to the branch, where the head of the Jericho custom-house sat in his undignified position, and His calling him by name, indicate supernatural knowledge; but they most probably do.

Our Lord is not accustomed to name people without having some deep significance in doing so. There is always an emphasis of love or warning or authority in His use of men's names.

Here He would probably let Zacchæus feel that He was completely known, down to the hidden stirrings in his heart, and certainly asserts mastership, and demands a disciple's allegiance. He who saw Nathanael under the fig-tree, and claimed him as a follower by naming him, sees Zacchæus in the sycomore, and claims him: "I have called thee by thy name; thou art Mine."

There is no other instance of Christ's volunteering His company; and His thus inviting Himself to Zacchæus' house

shows that He knew that He would be welcome, and that the wish to ask Him was only held back from utterance by the sense of unworthiness. Christ never goes where He is not wanted, any more than He stays away where He is; but He often comes in more abundant self-communication and larger gifts than we dare ask, however we may long for them. The lowly silence of humbly repressed desires is eloquent prayer in His ears, and will be astonished by responses exceeding abundant above what was asked or thought.

Sometimes, too, it is His answer which first interprets to us our wishes. Zacchæus did not know half what he really wanted when he scrambled up into the sycomore, saying to himself, "I want to have a look at Rabbi Joshua, that I may know what sort of a man He is." The joyful leap which his heart gave when Christ said that He would come to his house, told the publican what shy wish had been lurking in the background all the while.

Observe, too, that "must." Everything else gives way to the work of winning a soul. That can arrest Christ's resolute march to the cross. Jesus oftens speaks of a great "must" ruling His life, and here it determines a comparatively small thing; for the small thing is a means of accomplishing the great end of seeking and saving (ver. 10), and only he who is faithful to the law of the Father's will in small things will keep it in great.

The offer of visiting Zacchæus expresses Christ's kindly feelings, and declares that he has no share in the common aversion. It probably was the first time that any one outside his own set had held out a friend's hand, and the kindness is as sweet as strange. That voluntary association with the outcast is a symbol of Christ's whole work. It is more than a symbol, for the very same desire to save, and willingness to be identified with the impure, which led His feet into the shunned home of Zacchæus, led Him from glory

to earth, and caused Him to "dwell among us." He wins us to Himself by showing that His love shrinks from no contact with our pollution; and all the despised and impure, from whom men who are not righteous but only self-righteous, turn away with a sniff of scorn may find in the sinless One friendship which does not despise, and love which heals the sins that it covers.

The crowd murmured; but their murmurs, as is so often the case, glorify Christ, and are praises unmeant. Where should He be guest so fittingly as with a man that is a sinner? If the man wishes and welcomes Him, there will He dwell; for that is the home which He seeks. Zacchæus comes down as fast as he can, and is glad; for he has found a Saviour. Christ is glad, for He has found a sinner, whom He will make a saint. Both have found what they sought.

III. Note the transforming effect of Christ's love. The point at which Zacchæus made his profession of restitution, is not defined. Apparently (ver. 9) it was not in the way but the house. There is no mention of any feast or crowd, but probably the rest of the day and evening was spent in earnest converse between Christ and him, of which the result is given in summary.

The experience of Christ's love convinces of sin far more thoroughly than threats. The frowns of society only make the wrong-doer more hard and merciless; but the touch of love melts him, as a warm hand laid on snow. The sight of Jesus reveals our own unlikeness, and makes us long after some faint resemblance to Him. So Zacchæus did not need Christ to bid him make restitution, nor show him the blackness of his life; but, sitting there beside the Lord, the rich publican sees all the past in a new light, and, feeling the strange love creeping round his heart, he is aware that there is something sweeter than ill-gotten gains. The young ruler of our last lesson could not make up his

mind to part with all in order to follow Jesus. Zacchæus has so completely made up his mind to follow Jesus, that parting with much, and using the rest for Him, is the most natural thing in the world, and needs no commands.

If we love Jesus Christ as He deserves, we shall not need to be told to give Him our all. A reduction of wealth by one-half at a stroke and fourfold restitution out of the remainder would not leave much behind. But the less we have to carry, the fitter are we for the pilgrim's life, and the closer we can tread in the footsteps of Him who left the glory which He had with the Father for our sake.

> "Give all thou canst; high heaven rejects the lore
> Of nicely calculated less or more."

The true spring of self-sacrifice is the reception of Christ's love. That changes the whole set of the affections, brings new estimates of the relative value of the material and the spiritual, delivers from the bondage of corruption, makes saints out of sinners, and out of greedy, dishonest tax collectors patterns of lavish beneficence and contemners of worldly gain. The Ethiopian cannot change his skin; but Christ can change his heart, and that will clear his dusky cuticle by degrees. Our Lord's final words are partly an explanation of His impugned conduct in going to be Zacchæus' guest, and partly the assurance to him of his reception into the company of the "saved."

Note the calm dignity and self-assertion of Jesus, identifying His coming into the house with the coming of salvation. Who else would have dared to say that without being laughed or hissed down as insufferably arrogant? Observe the reason for His coming; namely, that Zacchæus also is a "son of Abraham," publican as he is. That cannot mean merely a born Jew, but must refer to true spiritual descent and affinity.

But this son was a lost son, and the mission of Christ was to seek and to save such. His entrance into the house was in the line of the purpose of His whole errand to the world, and to murmur at it was to misconceive Him altogether. The words would come with healing balm to Zacchæus, as they may come to all. No heart is too foul for Jesus' entrance, if only there be the desire that He should enter. He comes wherever He finds an open door; He ever answers dim, half-unconscious longings; and where He comes, salvation comes, and out of stones, or hearts as hard, He raises up sons of Abraham and heirs of eternal life.

LESSON XXXV.

"Till He come."

ST. LUKE xix. 11-27.

11. "And as they heard these things, He added and spake a parable, because He was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear.

12. He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return.

13. And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come.

14. But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us.

15. And it came to pass, that when he was returned, having received the kingdom, then he commanded these servants to be called unto Him, to whom he had given the money, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading.

16. Then came the first, saying, Lord, Thy pound hath gained ten pounds.

17. And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities.

18. And the second came, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds.

19. And he said likewise to him, Be thou also over five cities.

20. And another came, saying, Lord, behold, here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin:

21. For I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that thou layedst not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow.

22. And he saith unto him, Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant. Thou knewest that I was an austere man, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not sow:

23. Wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury?

24. And he said unto them that stood by, Take from him the pound, and give it to him that hath ten pounds.

25. (And they said unto him, Lord, he hath ten pounds.)

26. For I say unto you, That unto every one which hath shall be given: and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him.

27. But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither and slay them before me."

LUKE'S introduction to this parable implies that it was spoken either in Zacchæus' house or immediately after leaving it, and to the persons who had been there. The occasion assigned for it is twofold, the second part being closely connected with the first, as is shown by there being but one "because" in the Greek. Christ's nearness to Jerusalem, and the impression that His entrance there was to bring about a crisis, had inflamed the expectations, both of the disciples and of the multitude, who were ready for any excitement.

The object of the parable is not to state the Christian doctrine of reward for faithfulness, which is only part of its contents, but to damp down the expectation of the immediate bursting in of the kingdom, by displaying the double series of events which must go before its appearance; namely, the protracted, faithful trading of His servants, and the antagonism of His foes, with the issues of both these when the King does appear.

The introduction, then, of the enemies, is no result of the evangelist's having run two parables together, but is a necessary part of the whole picture. We have two main divisions:

I. What precedes the appearance of the kingdom. Three different lines of activity are shadowed,—the prince's in the far-off land, the servants', and the enemies' in the territory which is to be his kingdom. Jesus does not say that He is the man of noble birth, but His hearers could not mistake His meaning. Thus He calmly assumes to be the destined King of the kingdom of God, and hints in veiled fashion, at His lofty nature and the mystery of incarnation.

It is probably over-ingenious to see in the picture of the candidate for the throne travelling to the distant seat of sovereignty, allusion to Archelaus' journey to Rome to beg his father's throne from Augustus. The situation was common in those times, and most felicitously set forth one side

of the purpose of the Ascension, while it negatives, by the emphatic statement of the distance of the capital, the heated expectations of the listeners. Christ teaches here, as always, that His departure is the pre-requisite to His investiture with the visible sovereignty of the world; that many long days must pass before He comes again; but that, while absent, He is not idle, but carrying on that "asking" which from of old was declared to be the condition of His receiving "the uttermost parts of the earth" for a possession.

A glimpse within the veil is given us, and we behold Him occupied there in furthering His suit for the manifestation of that dominion which, since His ascension, He exercises at the right hand of God, crowned with glory and honour. Till then two contrasted sets of activities go on here. His servants trade with the small capital which He has left them, and His enemies struggle against His rule.

The two characteristics of the gifts to the former must be especially noted. They are absolutely the same in amount in every case, and they are of very small value. By both they are sharply distinguished from the talents in the sister parable. What, then, is the uniformly identical gift which all Christ's servants receive? If we are to seek for any one answer, we must either say the blessing of salvation, which is common to all, or, perhaps better, the word of the gospel. The latter interpretation is in line with Paul's frequent references to "the trust" which is "committed" to his "stewardship." Talents vary "according to the grace that is given to us" and natural disposition and adventitious circumstances. The pound is the same to all. "The common salvation" belongs to all alike. The same gospel is entrusted to all.

Why is it represented as a small sum? A pound was very little for a noble, who was going to be a king, to start trusted servants in business with. Perhaps, because the Christian's

gift from his absent Lord is of little worth in the world's eyes, or, more probably, in order to contrast it with the greatness of the result of faithfulness. Everything here, including our measure of salvation or of knowledge of the Divine word, is dwarfed by comparison with the solemn majesty and boundlessness of the glory which shall be revealed in us, as high hills sink to apparent hillocks when some Alpine range throws off its veil of mist and towers to heaven. The small capital makes the faithfulness of service the more noticeable, and suggests that the great purpose of life is to test and to train,—that its trivial business is only great when regarded as the means of obtaining what is infinitely greater. Life is redeemed from insignificance by being looked at in connection with the stupendous magnitudes beyond, which also make it seem small. The more closely we link it with eternity, the smaller it will seem in itself, the greater in its issues. The servants are to trade, and to do it with continual anticipation of their Lord's coming.

The citizens are plainly, in the proper application of the parable, the Jews, and their opposition is traced to hatred—is regarded as obstinate and unchanging during the absence, and as rising to the height of remonstrance with the supreme power, and impotent rebellion against its decree. That needs no comment, except the remark that here the severity of tone, which marks our Lord's final conflict with the Jewish authorities and nation as represented by them, begins to colour His language.

II. The second half of the parable paints the circumstances of the appearance of the kingdom. It is to be very unlike the sanguine, vulgar expectations of both disciples and crowd. The servants are to be summoned to give in their accounts; the enemies, to be swiftly slain in His presence. Thus a solemn diet of judgment is to inaugurate it. The

great principle of degrees in reward according to degrees in faithfulness is laid down. Thus this parable is the converse and completion of that of the talents, which taught that equal faithfulness in the use of unequal gifts received equal reward.

The joy of the Lord is one for all servants, but the dominion in the future is proportioned to faithfulness here. Note that the difference between the results must be supposed to depend, not on circumstances beyond the servants' control, but on their diligence. Observe, also, the omission of commendation to the second servant, which implies a less degree of faithful effort in him. The first represents Christians who excel; the second, Christians who are contented with small attainments and achievements. They do not put any special zeal or pains into their work, and may be a fair average, but no more. They do not lose their reward, but the realm over which they rule is small in comparison with what it might have been. There is salvation in fulness, and also salvation "so as by fire."

It is of more importance to have this truth of varying rewards even amidst the one bliss of the same heaven, fixed in our minds and stimulating our energies, than to inquire what kind of dominion, and over whom, the parable shadows. Enough to know that faithful servants will share in their Lord's sovereignty, and exercise dominion like His own,—namely, rule which is service,—somewhere in His wide kingdom. Observe, too, the humility with which the servants present their gains. They say nothing about their own diligence. It is the Lord's pound, not their pains, that has made the profit.

The pound and the pains are both due to Him who gives the treasure into our hands, and gives also the grace to use it. Yet we determine the measure of grace which we receive, and, whilst our faithfulness affords us no ground of

boasting, it supplies him with the occasion for reward. He gives the crowns which the elders cast before Him. That graduation in reward is not the result merely of His will that it should be so. Each receives as much as by his earthly life he has become capable of absorbing. If the second servant could have managed ten cities, he would have had them.

The servants are not all rewarded; but we do not know how many of the unnamed seven were faithful, and how many slothful. One idler is put before us, and stands for the class. His excuse seems to himself to be sufficient, and its very rudeness guarantees its sincerity. No man would speak so to his judge. But Christ translates thoughts into words, in order to show their falsity, and perhaps to suggest the solemn lesson that the inmost, unavowed motives shall one day be plain to us, and that we shall be compelled to speak them out, however ugly and foolish they sound. Men will be their own accusers and condemnation.

The excuse lays bare a very frequent cause of indolence; namely, fear, built on a misconception of the character of the Lord and Giver of all gifts. With his pound in his hand this man dares to think that his Lord is hard and severe in reckoning. Men darken their own spirits by thinking of God as demanding rather than as giving,—and that while everything they have and see should teach them that He is the giving God. Such thoughts of Him paralyse activity and destroy the one all-powerful motive for service. Only when we know His infinite love, and are moved by His mercies, shall we task every power in grateful and joyful service. This man was a servant in name. How many Christians are there who live in idleness because the spirit of fear is not cast out!

The prince's answer is difficult, as no explanation of the "bank" is wholly satisfactory. Perhaps the best is that

which takes it to mean the Church in its associated efforts, in some part of which the most timid may share, and, bringing his small contribution to the common stock, may be able to do something for Christ. If we cannot launch the ship alone, we can at least lend a hand at the ropes, where others are pulling too.

The slothful servant is deprived of the gift which he had not used. That looks hard, and often draws forth remonstrances, or at least wonder. But we see it here, and we shall see it yonder. Christ states a law of human experience which works everywhere. Used faculties grow; unused ones decay. But how can gifts so personal as those which the servants have, be transferred? Obviously the language must be interpreted with some allowance for parabolic form. It may suffice to say that the deprivation of the idler makes the rewards of the diligent the more conspicuous, and the honour of their delegated rule the more signal. But the solemn law which closes the words about the slothful man, makes certain the blissful growth of heaven, and the progressive stripping of the rejected. How far that deprivation of unused capacities may go we cannot tell. There may be only as much of the man left as will be conscious of existence and of loss. It is a dread prospect.

The parable is not complete with the rewards and retribution of the servants. As we have seen, its purpose was to portray the course of events which must precede the appearance of the kingdom, and the stern judgment which should inaugurate it. In fact, it is the programme of the world's history till the end, and the enemies are as important, though not as conspicuous, a part of the whole as the servants.

They represent primarily the Jews, but it is surely an incongruous thrusting of history into parable to take the terrible vengeance on them, which is the very last act of the

king after he has returned, as meaning nothing more than the destruction of Jerusalem. Surely the "slaying" here is more terrible than physical death. It points to that same awful retribution of hatred and opposition to the King of which the New Testament is full. That expression, "before me," leads us tremblingly to think of "everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord."

LESSON XXXVI.

A new kind of King.

St. Luke xix. 37-48.

37. "And when He was come nigh, even now at the descent of the mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen;

38. Saying, Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest.

39. And some of the Pharisees from among the multitude said unto Him, Master, rebuke Thy disciples.

40. And He answered and said unto them, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out.

41. And when He was come near, He beheld the city, and wept over it.

42. Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.

43. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side,

44. And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.

45. And He went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold therein, and them that bought;

46. Saying unto them, It is written, My house is the house of prayer: but ye have made it a den of thieves.

47. And He taught daily in the temple. But the chief priests and the scribes and the chief of the people sought to destroy Him,

48. And could not find what they might do: for all the people were very attentive to hear Him."

"HE went on before." What concentrated determination, and almost eagerness, impelled His firm and swift steps up the steep, weary road! Mark tells that the

disciples followed, "amazed"—as they well might be—at the unusual haste, and strange preoccupation on the face, set as a flint.

Luke takes no notice of the stay at Bethany and the sweet seclusion which soothed Jesus there. He dwells only on the assertion of royalty, which stamped an altogether unique character on the remaining hours of Christ's life.

I. The narrative brings into prominence Christ's part in originating the triumphal entry (vers. 30-34). He sent for the colt with the obvious intention of stimulating the people to just such a demonstration as followed.

As to the particulars, we need only note that the most obvious explanation of His knowledge of the circumstances that the messengers would encounter, is that it was supernatural. Only one other explanation is possible; namely, that the owners of the animals were secret disciples, with whom our Lord had arranged to send for it, and had settled a sign and countersign by which they would know His messengers. But that is a less natural explanation.

Note the remarkable blending of dignity and poverty in "The Lord hath need of him." It asserts sovereign authority and absolute rights, and it confesses need and penury. He is a King, but He has to borrow even a colt to make His triumphal entry on. Though He was rich, for our sakes He became poor.

Jesus then deliberately brought about His public entry. He thereby acts in a way perfectly unlike His whole previous course. And He stirs up popular feelings at a time when they were specially sensitive, by reason of the approaching passover and its crowds. Formerly He had avoided the danger which He now seems to court, and had gone up to the feast "as it were in secret." But it was fitting that once, for the last time, He should assert before the gathered Israel that He was their King, and should make a last appeal. Formerly

He had sought to avoid attracting the attention of the rulers; now He knows that the end is near, and deliberately makes Himself conspicuous, though—or we might say because—He knew that thereby He precipitated His death.

The nature of His dominion is as plainly taught by the humble pomp as is its reality. A pauper King, who makes His public entrance into His city mounted on a borrowed ass, with His followers' clothes for a saddle, attended by a shouting crowd of poor peasants, who for weapons or banners had but the branches plucked from other people's trees, was a new kind of king.

We do not need Matthew's quotation of the prophet's vision of the meek King coming to Zion on an ass, to understand the contrast of this kingdom with such a dominion as that of Rome, or of such princes as the Herods. Gentleness and peace, a sway that rests not on force nor wealth, are shadowed in that rustic procession and the pathetic poverty of its leader, throned on a borrowed colt, and attended, not by warriors or dignitaries, but by poor men unarmed, and saluted, not with the blare of trumpets, but with the shouts of joyful, though, alas! fickle hearts.

II. We have the humble procession with the shouting disciples and the background of hostile spies. The disciples eagerly caught at the meaning of bringing the colt, and threw themselves with alacrity into what seemed to them preparation for the public assertion of royalty, for which they had long been impatient. Luke tells us that they lifted Jesus on to the seat which they hurriedly prepared, while some spread their garments in the way,—the usual homage to a king:

> "Ride on triumphantly; behold, we lay
> Our lusts and proud wills in thy way."

How different the vision of the future in their minds and His! They dreamed of a throne; He knew it was a cross.

Round the southern shoulder of Olivet they came, and, as the long line of the temple walls, glittering in the sunshine across the valley, burst on the view, and their approach could be seen from the city, they broke into loud acclamations, summoning, as it were, Jerusalem to welcome its King.

Luke's version of their chant omits the Jewish colouring which it has in the other Gospels, as was natural, in view of His Gentile readers. Christ's royalty and Divine commission are proclaimed from a thousand throats, and then up swells the shout of praise, which echoes the angels' song at Bethlehem, and ascribes to His coming power to make peace in heaven with an else alienated world, and thus to make the Divine glory blaze with new splendour even in the highest heavens.

Their song was wiser than they knew, and touched the deepest, sweetest mysteries of the unity of the Son with the Father, of reconciliation by the blood of His cross, and of the new lustre accruing to God's name thereby, even in the sight of principalities and powers in heavenly places. They meant none of these things, but they were unconscious prophets. Their shouts died away, and their faith was almost as short-lived. With many of them, it withered before the branches which they waved.

High-wrought emotion is a poor substitute for steady conviction. But cool, unemotional recognition of Christ as King is as unnatural. If our hearts do not glow with loyal love, nor leap up to welcome Him ; if the contemplation of His work and its issues on earth and in heaven does not make our dumb tongues sing,—we have need to ask ourselves if we believe at all that He is the King and Saviour of all and of us. There were cool observers there, and they make the foil to the glad enthusiasm. Note that these Pharisees, mingling in the crowd, have no title for Jesus but "Teacher."

He is no King to them. To those who regard Jesus but as a human teacher, the acclamations of those to whom He is King and Lord always sound exaggerated.

People with no depth of religious life hate religious emotion, and are always seeking to repress it. A very tepid worship is warm enough for them. Formalists detest genuine feeling. Propriety is their ideal. No doubt, too, these croakers feared that this tumult might come to formidable size, and bring down Pilate's heavy hand on them.

Christ's answer is probably a quoted proverb. It implies His entire acceptance of the character which the crowd ascribed to Him, His pleasure in their praises, and, in a wider aspect, His vindication of outbursts of devout feeling, which shock ecclesiastical martinets and formalists.

III. We see the sorrowing King plunged in bitter grief in the very hour of His triumph. Who can venture to speak of that infinitely pathetic scene? The fair city, smiling across the glen, brings before His vision the awful contrast of its lying compassed by armies and in ruins. He hears not the acclamation of the crowd. "He wept," or, rather, "wailed," —for the word does not imply tears so much as cries. That sorrow is a sign of His real manhood, but it is also a part of His revelation of the very heart of God. The form is human, the substance Divine. The man weeps because God pities. Christ's sorrow does not hinder His judgments. The woes which wring His heart will nevertheless be inflicted by Him. Judgment is His "strange work," alien from His desires; but it *is* His work. The eyes which are as a flame of fire are filled with tears, but their glance burns up the evil.

Note the yearning in the unfinished sentence, "If thou hadst known." Note the decisive closing of the time of repentance. Note the minute prophetic details of the siege, which, if ever they were spoken, are a distinct proof of His all-seeing eye. And from all let us fix in our hearts

the conviction of the pity of the judge, and of the judgment by the pitying Christ.

IV. We have Christ's exercise of sovereign authority in His Father's house. Luke gives but a summary in verses 45-48, dwelling mainly on two points. First he tells of casting out the traders. Two things are brought out in the compressed narrative,—the fact, and the Lord's vindication of it. As to the former, it was fitting that at the end of His career, as at the beginning, He should cleanse the temple. The two events are significant as His first and last acts. The second one, as we gather from the other evangelists, had a greater severity about it than the first.

The need for a second purifying indicated how sadly transient had been the effect of the first, and was thus evidence of the depth of corruption and formalism to which the religion of priests and people had sunk. Christ had come to cleanse the temple of the world's religion, to banish from it mercenaries and self-interested attendants at the altar, and, in a higher application of the incident, to clear away all the degradations and uncleannesses which are associated with worship everywhere but in His Church, and which are ever seeking, like poisonous air, to find their way in thither also, through any unguarded chink.

The vindication of the act is in right royal style. The first cleansing was defended by Him by pointing to the sanctity of "My Father's house;" the second, by claiming it as "My house." The rebuke of the hucksters is sterner the second time. The profanation, once driven out and returning, is deeper; for whereas, in the first instance, it had made the temple "a house of merchandise," in the second it turned it into a "den of robbers." Thus evil assumes a darker tint, like old oak, by lapse of time, and swiftly becomes worse, if rebuked and chastised in vain.

The second part of this summary puts in sharp contrast

three things,—Christ's calm courage in continuous teaching in the temple, the growing bitter hatred of the authorities, who drew in their train the men of influence holding no office, and the eager hanging of the people on His words, which baffled the murderous designs of the rulers. The same intentional publicity as in the entrance is obvious. Jesus knew that His hour was come, and willingly presents Himself a sacrifice. Meekly and boldly He goes on the appointed way. He sees all the hate working round Him, and lets it work. The day's task of winning some from impending ruin shall still be done. So should His servants live, in patient discharge of daily duty, in the face of death, if need be.

The enemies, who heard His words and found in them only food for deeper hatred, may warn us of the possibilities of antagonism to Him that lie in the heart, and of the terrible judgment which they drag down on their own heads, who hear, unmoved, His daily teaching, and see, unrepentant, His dying love. The crowd that listened, and, in less than a week, yelled "Crucify Him!" may teach us to take heed how we hear, and to beware of evanescent regard for His teaching, which, if it do not consolidate into resolved and thorough-going acceptance of His work and submission to His rule, will certainly cool into disregard, and may harden into hate.

LESSON XXXVII.

The Vine-dressers who Wanted to be Owners.

ST. LUKE XX. 9-19.

9. "Then began He to speak to the people this parable; A certain man planted a vineyard, and let it forth to husbandmen, and went into a far country for a long time.

10. And at the season he sent a servant to the husbandmen, that they should give him of the fruit of the vineyard: but the husbandmen beat him, and sent him away empty.

11. And again he sent another servant: and they beat him also, and entreated him shamefully, and sent him away empty.

12. And again he sent a third: and they wounded him also, and cast him out.

13. Then said the lord of the vineyard, What shall I do? I will send my beloved son: it may be they will reverence him when they see him.

14. But when the husbandmen saw him, they reasoned among themselves, saying, This is the heir: come, let us kill him, that the inheritance may be our's.

15. So they cast him out of the vineyard, and killed him. What therefore shall the lord of the vineyard do unto them?

16. He shall come and destroy these husbandmen, and shall give the vineyard to others. And when they heard it, they said, God forbid.

17. And He beheld them, and said, What is this then that is written, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner?

18. Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.

19. And the chief priests and the scribes the same hour sought to lay hands on Him; and they feared the people: for they perceived that He had spoken this parable against them."

THE severity of our Lord's tone in these last days of His ministry was, like the publicity of His entrance into Jerusalem, deliberately adopted, in order to bring the long conflict with unbelief to an issue. This parable had

an important share in determining the murderous resolves of the rulers (ver. 19). And no wonder; for its scathing summary of the past, its indictment of His listeners, and its threatenings, must have lashed opposition to fury. We may gather its teachings into three main points:

I. Note the husbandman and the servants. The beginning of the parable is almost a quotation from Isaiah, and would recall his "song touching the vineyard." That song had its interpretation attached, and it interpreted the transparent parable. The facts underlying the representation are: God's institution of the theocracy; the giving of law and sacrifice, of land and protection, and whatever besides the nation needed for bringing forth fruit of devotion and holiness; the temporary cessation of miracle, and special manifestations of God's presence, after the establishment of the people in their possessions; the mission of the prophets, who came to summon Israel to the life becoming their privileges; and the rejection of these Divine messengers.

Luke touches the preparation of the vineyard more lightly than Matthew, and diverges from him also in arranging the mission of the servants in three divisions, and in limiting their evil treatment to a climatic series of assaults—"beat," "handled shamefully," "wounded and cast forth"—short of the extremity of murder. It is needless to inquire what particular acts are meant, or whether any distinction is intended between sets of prophets. The latter is extremely improbable, in view of the difference in the number of the embassies according to the accounts of Matthew and of Luke.

Of more importance is it to note the dark picture, given by unerring Wisdom, of the history of the nation from the beginning. Unrelieved gloom covers it, and Stephen was but following in Christ's steps when he charged the nation,

as a whole, with one undeviating course of resistance to the whole body of God's messengers. Here the crime of the ruling classes is uppermost in our Lord's words ; but these had always found the people ready to dance to their piping, and be the tools of their hate.

Mark the unity of the successive generations, as represented by the husbandmen being the same throughout. Descendants are but too apt to do as their fathers did, and, when they do, the accumulated guilt of centuries lies on them, and the slow-gathering avalanche of judgment is loosed at last to thunder down on their heads.

Privileges given are given that the recipients may bring God the fruit. We get nothing merely that we may enjoy it, or plume ourselves on our superior enlightenment or advantages, but in order that we may render fruit of love and service, of trust and righteousness. But human nature repeats in all ages and Churches the Jewish rulers' crime, and is proud of privileges and forgets the resulting duties. The world and the Church generally pay just such wages to their prophets as Israel did. Stoning and sawing asunder have gone out of fashion, but let a messenger of God seek to awake a degenerate and worldly Church to self-sacrifice and real devotion, and he will get the modern version of the old reception.

II. The parable goes on to show us the husbandmen and the son (vers. 13-15). The lord of the vineyard's words (ver. 13) represent him as deliberating doubtfully, and making an experiment, uncertain as to its issue. How can such a representation accord with God's knowledge? We may easily lose ourselves in metaphysical puzzles as to the Divine fore-knowledge, about which men are usually the more confident the less they have pondered ; but the fact remains that the patient love of God is not worn out by frequent failures, but still goes on to plead with and woo the

rebellious, trying stronger attractions as their distance increases, just as if He "hoped all things," and could not give up the expectation that His long-suffering may win them to repentance.

The representation is, no doubt, accommodated to the necessities of the parable and the limitations of human conceptions; but it at least sets forth most pathetically the unwearied efforts of God's love, and recognises the terrible fact of human freedom as capable of thwarting all these.

The self-consciousness of Jesus is wonderfully witnessed by the broad distinction which He draws between Himself and all the other messengers. They are servants; He is the "beloved Son." That name cannot be merely the synonym for Messiah, nor refer to His earthly office; for the relation which it expresses existed before the lord of the vineyard said, "I will send." This entirely incidental and unexplained assumption, by Jesus, of a title so august, and a dignity so far above all prophets, either lifts Him to the level of divinity, or sinks Him beneath the level of wise and modest religious teachers. The husbandmen's "reasoning with themselves" suggests two questions: Did the rulers know that Jesus was the Christ? Did they seek to kill Him that they might continue undisturbed in their prerogatives? "If ye were blind ye would have no sin." "Brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers." But the ignorance which absolves from blame must be complete, involuntary, disturbed by no gleams which, followed, would have led out of the cavern into the sunshine.

Christ's contemporaries had knowledge enough to have led them to more, and they were criminal in that they stifled dawning convictions and hardened themselves against plain facts. Jesus is here dragging into light thoughts which the rulers had never articulately spoken to themselves, but

which were none the less motives, though unavowed, and perhaps unsuspected. Many an uneasy doubt had been crushed, many a conviction quenched. The lesson for us is, to make sure that we are true to faint glimmers of light, and that we are not the slaves of motives which we dare not put into words.

Certainly the rulers' motive was mainly the retention of their own prerogatives, which they felt Jesus was likely to destroy. He attacked their learning as cobwebs and trifling, their practice as self-righteousness, their authority as null. That was enough to settle their attitude, no matter what His virtue, wisdom, miraculous power, or manifest devotion. Are there no people nowadays who would be as tenacious in their grip of privileges, and as hostile to any hand that struck at these? So we come to the tragic close. Mark especially the majestic calmness with which our Lord foretells His death. He is ready for the cross, which is now so near.

III. The parable closes with the husbandmen and the returning lord of the vineyard, to which is appended a still more severe threatening and closer application (vers. 15-18). According to Mark and Luke, Christ answers His own question. The threatening of judgment comes most naturally from His lips. His part in that retribution is, for the present, veiled; but the same event which is here spoken of as the coming of the lord of the vineyard is elsewhere spoken of as the coming of the Son of man. The Father hath committed all judgment to the Son.

The rejection of Jesus is the crowning sin, even because His mission is God's last appeal, and the only thing left is to punish. The deceitfulness of sin is shown by this terrible irony of retributive providence, whereby the act that was prompted by desire to grasp the inheritance for their own casts these men out of it. It is Matthew, not Luke, as might have been expected, who makes the transference of

the vineyard to another "nation" prominent, while our evangelist, whose "universalism" is sometimes supposed to warp his narrative, passes it by. There is danger of exaggerating the special standpoint of each Gospel, to the detriment of the historical value of each and the substantial unity of all.

The ruler's exclamation "God forbid!" looks as it some inkling of Christ's meaning was dawning on them, else the fate of the husbandmen would scarcely have called out such fervent deprecation. They half consciously put the cap on, and, like the rest of us, are more anxious to escape consequences than to avoid sins. What they should have said was, "God be merciful to us sinners," and what they should have done was to have welcomed the Son, and rendered the fruit which He came seeking in vain. More or less formal prayers deprecatory of judgment are useless while the course that drags down judgment is persisted in.

Jesus sharpens His warnings still more, that their point may pierce some conscience. That steady gaze of His which Luke records was stern and all-searching, but loving and pleading too. The "then" of His answer implies, "Your wish that it may not be so is vain, and the judgment is certain; for it is thus written." The figure is changed, but the meaning is the same.

Whatever was the occasion of the psalm, Jesus here lays His hand on it, and claims it as speaking of Him. Lower, typical meanings it no doubt had, and was rooted in some unknown historical fact; but for us its meaning is fixed by Him. There are other prophecies about the foundation-stone, and the stone cut out without hands, which are all smelted together here to teach the one great truth, that Jesus Christ is the foundation (and, subordinately, that He is the bond of union between the two divergent walls, which represent Jew and Gentile) laid by God; and though

rejected by those to whom the task of building up God's house had been entrusted, still is in history and fact what He was from of old intended to be. The husbandmen's killing of the Son is not the end of the Son. God's purpose works through opposing agents, and is accomplished by apparent defeat. If, then, opposition is futile, judgment is sure. What can become of the builders who flung the foundation-stone aside, when it is set in its place? Nothing but destruction. So our Lord's last words give grave warning to us all, and declare the universal law regulating the relations to Him of all men who hear the gospel.

They embrace two cases. To fall on the stone while it lies passive on the ground is to be broken. That points to the harm and loss that befall unbelievers now and here. No man rejects Jesus without hurting Himself. But what will happen when the stone, lifted high, begins to move? It must crush whatever lies in its path. That is what will befall unbelievers, when He comes again for judgment. He is either a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence, or the sure foundation on which, building, we shall never be confounded.

LESSON XXXVIII.

The Lord's Supper.

St. Luke xxii. 7-20.

7. "Then came the day of unleavened bread, when the passover must be killed.

8. And He sent Peter and John, saying, Go and prepare us the passover, that we may eat.

9. And they said unto Him, Where wilt thou that we prepare?

10. And He said unto them, Behold, when ye are entered into the city, there shall a man meet you, bearing a pitcher of water; follow him into the house where he entereth in.

11. And ye shall say unto the goodman of the house, The Master saith unto thee, Where is the guestchamber, where I shall eat the passover with My disciples?

12. And he shall shew you a large upper room furnished: there make ready.

13. And they went, and found as He had said unto them: and they made ready the passover.

14. And when the hour was come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him.

15. And He said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer:

16. For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God.

17. And He took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves:

18. For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come.

19. And He took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is My body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of Me.

20. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in My blood, which is shed for you.'

PAUL had his account of the Last Supper direct from Christ. Luke apparently had his from Paul, so that the variations from Matthew and Mark are invested with

singular interest, as probably traceable to the Lord of the feast Himself. Our lesson has three sections,—the preparation, the revelation of Christ's heart, and the institution of the rite.

I. The Preparation.—Peculiar to Luke are the names of the disciples entrusted with it, and the representation of the command, as preceding the disciples' question "Where?" The selection of Peter and John indicates the confidential nature of the task, which comes out still more plainly in the singular directions given to them. Luke's order of command and question seems more precise than that of the other Gospels, as making our Lord the originator instead of merely responsive to the disciples' suggestion.

How is the designation of the place which Christ gives to be understood? Was it supernatural knowledge, or was it the result of previous arrangement with the "goodman of the house"? Most probably the latter; for he was in so far a disciple that he recognised Jesus as "the Master," and was glad to have Him in his house, and the chamber on the roof was ready "furnished" when they came. Why this mystery about the place? The verses before our lesson tell the reason.

Judas was listening, too, for the answer to "Where?" thinking that it would give him the "opportunity" which he sought "to betray Him in the absence of the multitude." Jesus had much to say to His disciples, and needed the quiet hours in the upper room, and therefore sent away the two with directions which revealed nothing to the others. If He had told the group where the house was, the last supper might never have been instituted, nor the precious farewell words, the holy of holies of John's Gospel, ever been spoken. Jesus takes precautions to delay the cross. He takes none to escape it, but rather sets Himself in these last days to bring it near. The variety in His action means no

change in His mind, but both modes are equally the result of His self-forgetting love to us all. So He sends away Peter and John with sealed orders, as it were, and the greedy ears of the traitor are balked, and none know the appointed place till Jesus leads them to it. The two did not come back, but Christ guided the others to the house, when the hour was come.

II. Verses 14-18 give a glimpse into Christ's heart as He partook, for the last time, of the passover. He discloses His earnest desire for that last hour of calm before He went out to face the storm, and His vision of the future feast in the perfect kingdom. That desire touchingly shows His brotherhood in all our shrinking from parting with dear ones, and in our treasuring of the last sweet, sad moments of being together. That was a true human heart, "fashioned alike" with ours, which longed and planned for one quiet hour before the end, and found some bracing for Gethsemane and Calvary in the sanctities of the upper room. But the desire was not for Himself only. He wished to partake of that passover, and then to transform it for ever, and to leave the new rite to His servants.

Our Lord evidently ate of the passover; for we cannot suppose that His words in verse 15 relate to an ungratified wish; but, as evidently, that eating was finished before He spoke. We shall best conceive the course of events if we suppose that the earlier stages of the paschal ceremonial were duly attended to, and that the Lord's Supper was instituted in connection with its later parts. We need not discuss what was the exact stage at which our Lord spoke and acted as in verses 15-17. It is sufficient to note that in them He gives what He does not taste, and that, in giving, His thoughts travel beyond all the sorrow and death to reunion and perfected festal joys. These anticipations solaced His heart in that supreme hour. "For the joy that was set before

Him" He "endured the cross," and this was the crown of His joy, that all His friends should share it with Him, and sit at His table in His kingdom.

The prophetic aspect of the Lord's Supper should never be left out of view. It is at once a feast of memory and of hope, and is also a symbol for the present, inasmuch as it represents the conditions of spiritual life as being participation in the body and blood of Christ. This is where Paul learned his "till He come"; and that hope which filled the Saviour's heart should ever fill ours when we remember His death.

III. Verses 19 and 20 record the actual institution of the Lord's Supper. Note its connection with the rite which it transforms. The passover was the memorial of deliverance, the very centre of Jewish ritual. It was a family feast, and our Lord took the place of the head of the household. That solemnly appointed and long-observed memorial of the deliverance which made a mob of slaves into a nation is transfigured by Jesus, who calls upon Jew and Gentile to forget the venerable meaning of the rite, and remember rather His work for all men. It is strange presumption thus to brush aside the passover, and in effect to say, "I abrogate a Divinely enjoined ceremony, and breathe a new meaning into so much of it as I retain." Who is He who thus tampers with God's commandments? Surely He is either One having a co-ordinate authority, or—— But perhaps the alternative is best left unspoken.

The separation of the symbols of the body and blood plainly indicates that it is the death of Jesus, and that a violent one, which is commemorated. The double symbol carries in both its parts the same truth, but with differences. Both teach that all our hopes are rooted in the death of Jesus, and that the only true life of our spirits comes from participation in His death, and thereby in His life. But in

addition to this truth common to both, the wine, which represents His blood, is the seal of the "new covenant." Again we mark the extraordinary freedom with which Christ handles the most sacred parts of the former revelation, putting them aside as He wills, to set Himself in their place. He declares, by this rite, that through His death a new "covenant" comes into force as between God and man, in which all the anticipations of prophets are more than realised, and sins are remembered no more, and the knowledge of God becomes the blessing of all, and a close relationship of mutual possession is established between God and us, and His laws are written on loving hearts and softened wills.

Nor is even this all the meaning of that cup of blessing; for blood is the vehicle of life, and whoso receives Christ's blood on his conscience, to sprinkle it from dead works, therein receives, not only cleansing for the past, but a real communication of "the Spirit of life" which was "in Christ" to be the life of His life, so as that he can say, "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." Nor is even this all; for as wine is, all the world over, the emblem of festivity, so this cup declares that to partake of Christ is to have a fountain of joy in ourselves, which yet has a better source than ourselves. Nor is this all; for "this cup" is prophecy as well as memorial and symbol, and shadows the new wine of the kingdom and the marriage supper of the Lamb.

"This is My body" could not have meant to the hearers, who saw Him sitting there in bodily form, anything but "this is a symbol of my body."* It is but the common use of the

* Note.—The meaning of these words is in dispute among Christians, and it has been for centuries. One view of them is taken by the Romish and Greek Churches, another by the Lutherans, and yet several other views by different bodies of Protestant Christians. Dr. McLaren will be understood as stating his personal views at this point, rather than as declaring a view universally accepted by Christians.—The Editor.

word in explaining a figurative speech or act. "The field is the world; the tares are the children of the wicked one; the reapers are the angels,"—and so in a hundred cases.

Luke alone preserves for us the command to "do this," which at once establishes the rite as meant to be perpetual, and defines the true nature of it. It is a memorial, and, if we are to take our Lord's own explanation, only a memorial. There is nothing here of sacramental efficacy, but simply the loving desire to be remembered, and the condescending entrusting of some power to recall Him to these outward symbols. Strange that, if the communion were so much more, as the sacramentarian theory makes it, the feast's own Founder should not have said a word to hint that it was.

And how deep and yet lowly an insight into His hold on our hearts the institution of this ordinance shows Him to have had! The Greek is, literally, "In order to my remembrance." He knew that—strange and sad as it may seem, and impossible as, no doubt, it did seem to the disciples—we should be in constant danger of forgetting Him; and therefore, in this one case, He enlists sense on the side of faith, and trusts to these homely memorials the recalling to our treacherous memories of His dying love. He wished to live in our hearts, and that for the satisfaction of His own love and for the deepening of ours.

The Lord's Supper is a standing evidence of Christ's own estimate of where the centre of His work lies. We are to remember His death. Why should it be selected as the chief treasure for memory, unless it was something altogether different from the death of other wise teachers and benefactors? If it were in His case what it is in all others, the end of their activity for blessing, and no part of their message to the world, what need is there for the Lord's Supper, and what meaning is there in it if Christ's death were not the sacrifice for the world's sin? Surely no view of the signi-

ficance and purpose of the Cross but that which sees in it the propitiation for the world's sins accounts for this rite A Christianity which strikes the atoning death of Jesus out of its theology is sorely embarrassed to find a worthy meaning for His dying command, "This do in remembrance of Me."

But if the breaking of the precious alabaster box of His body was needful in order that "the house" might be "filled with the odour of the ointment," and if His death was the indispensable condition of pardon and impartation of His life, then "wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there," as its vital centre, shall His death be proclaimed, and this rite shall speak of it for a memorial of Him and "show the Lord's death till He come."

LESSON XXXIX.

Parting Counsels and Warnings.

St. Luke xxii. 24-37.

24. "And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest.

25. And He said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors.

26. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve.

27. For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth.

28. Ye are they which have continued with Me in My temptations.

29. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as My Father hath appointed unto Me;

30. That ye may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

31. And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat.

32. But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.

33. And he said unto Him, Lord, I am ready to go with Thee, both into prison, and to death.

34. And He said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest Me.

35. And He said unto them, When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye any thing? And they said, Nothing.

36. Then said He unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one.

37. For I say unto you, that this that is written must yet be accomplished in Me, And he was reckoned among the transgressors: for the things concerning Me have an end."

IT was a strange and yet intelligible strife which broke the solemnities of the Last Supper. Probably its immediate occasion was the unwillingness of each to play the

servant's part in washing the other's feet, which our Lord ended by doing it Himself. But, in any case, the fact that the disciples at such an hour not only questioned which was the traitor, but quarrelled, perhaps in consequence of that very question, which was the greater, discloses the imperfection of their sympathy with their Lord, and might well have brought rebuke and the expression of disappointment from Him.

The gentle teaching with which He seeks to instruct, without a word as to His pained heart, is a wonderful revelation of the unconquerable patience of Jesus with us, His slow scholars and imperfectly loving friends. That patience is exercised on the throne, as truly as in the upper room. The sayings of our Lord in this lesson cover many topics, and can scarcely be brought under any one title. Parting words, when much has to be said, and time to say it is short, are naturally thus miscellaneous, but all refer to the condition of the disciples in the impending storm, which is to burst as soon as they pass from the shelter of that quiet hour.

I. Christ lays down the law of greatness in His kingdom on earth, and the dignities of His kingdom in heaven. Rank in His kingdom is the exact opposite of what it is in the world. There its prerogative is to exercise "dominion, and the name of "benefactor" is given in hollow flattery to rulers, though they are scourges and tyrants. The world's lie witnesses to the true nature and purpose of authority, and it is the Church's truth. Doing good is the royal crown. Service is greatness, and greatness is service. Such is the law of Christ's Church, because such is the secret of Christ's life; and His Church lives only by participation of His life, which must necessarily unfold itself in it as it does in Him.

No doubt, the antithesis between sitting at meat and

serving is most forcible, if we see in "I am among you as he that serveth' reference to His girding Himself with the towel and taking the basin. If so, Luke and John beautifully explain each other. But, whether it be so or not, our Lord here grounds the law for us on His own example. The Highest has stooped lowest. His rule is by service and for service. Therefore, if we have drunk in of His spirit, and have been made victorious over self by the power of His self-sacrificing love, we shall regard all our superiority over others as an obligation to help them, and use it, not to feed miserable, paltry vanity, or to get for ourselves comforts and attention, but for the good of others.

The professing Church has a great deal to learn yet of the meaning of these solemn words, for there is as much striving of worldly ambition, and as great repugnance to take a menial place, among so-called Christians to-day as ever were shown in the upper room. We think the words very beautiful, and many of us, in our hearts, regard them as just a trifle quixotic and overstrained. At any rate, we live as if we did.

So far as the disciples' strife was right, our Lord responds to it, and meets legitimate longings for a place in His kingdom, in verses 28, 29. How beautifully that acknowledgment, "Ye are they which have continued with Me in My temptations," shows Christ's longing for sympathy, and the pain to Him of loneliness!

Note, in the words, the tempted Christ, all whose life was temptation, though the wilderness at the beginning, and the garden at the close, witnessed the keenest assaults. Note the solitary Christ, who clings to these men as if finding some alleviation of His terrible loneliness, even in their half-unintelligent company and weak love. Note the grateful Christ, who recognises the fidelity even of the men who so sadly failed to sympathise with Him, and were so

soon to desert Him. He is thankful even for the drop of impure water which their friendship lays on His lips.

Note the promise of reward. Some superfine moralists tell us that the regard for heavenly happiness is a very low motive. What a pity that Jesus did not know that lofty morality! He recognises the desire, and promises to fulfil it. What extraordinary promises from the lips of a Man within a few hours of His death as a criminal! He claims the power to determine men's destiny; He asserts His own dominion. Who is He, that He should give away kingdoms in this fashion? Had He any right to do so, and, if He had, what was His right?

He casts His promise into two forms,—the table and the thrones. The former points to the meal at which they were sitting, and turns its sorrow into joy. From it He went out to die, and they to forsake Him, to deny Him, to lament Him as lost for ever. From that other table they shall go no more out. Many a prophecy and parable converge to illustrate this promise, which speaks of that future as repose, full satisfaction of all capacities and desires, festivity and society. The thrones, on the other hand, point to participation in His kingly authority. The law for our kingship there shall be the same as that which He has just laid down for it here. Then, as now, dignity shall mean service, in higher forms and on a wider scale than we can dream of now, but still service. What further glory is intended by the judicial office here attributed to the saints, we must wait for experience to teach. Enough that it shall be the result of union with Jesus the King and Judge, whereby all His servants, partaking of His life, shall in some unknown manner share His offices and be invested with His dignity.

II. The vain warning to self-confidence. The sudden transition to Peter may have been occasioned by the word

"temptations" in verse 28, or by the departure of Judas, into whom Satan had entered. The same enemy who had conquered the traitor, was threatening all ("you," plural), and especially one. Christ foresees and forewarns,—proof at once of Divine knowledge and love. The emphatic repetition of his name calls for Peter's special attention, and seeks to shake his self-complacency. "Simon" warns him of his weakness, and of the danger of relapsing to the old, simply human character.

The warning thus impressively introduced falls into three parts,—the disclosure of the impending assault and assailant, the majestic intervention of Jesus as the victorious antagonist of the evil power, and the glimpse of future duty and blessing as the result of fall and recovery. It augurs little reverence for Christ to treat these words as mere metaphor or accommodation to popular error. They are enigmatical and incomplete, as all references to that dread subject are; but they seem clearly to imply the reality of an evil personality, who desires to wreck all good effort, and to blast every Christ-loving heart, and turn out of the way all Christ-following feet.

The limitation of his power is also taught. His malignity cannot shake his sieve without God's permission. He is held in a leash, which he loathes, but cannot break. It is the doctrine of the prologue to Job endorsed by Jesus, and it should be accepted by us. It is but a glimpse into the dark world, but it reveals a truth as to all Christ's servants which may well make us self-distrustful. Jesus presents Himself to Peter's faith and ours as more than a match for the enemy. He is our Intercessor, and prays with special and discriminating earnestness for the one who is in most danger. What did He pray? Not that the apostle might be spared the trial, but that his faith might not die out. Was His prayer then in vain, since Peter fell?

By no means; for, though his faith was eclipsed for the moment, it did not fail in the long run. So we may be sure that, the more we need Christ's intercession and intervention, the more it is put forth for us; and, though our feet may stumble, recovery is possible by the power of His restoring arm and the efficacy of His pleading voice.

The defence of the soul in temptation and its recovery are blessedly set forth here. The future happy results of the lessons learned in fall and recovery are taught in the last clause of the warning. Peter was sifted; but it was the chaff, not the wheat, that was got rid of. His fall and restoration purified him of his rashness, his self-confidence, his love of being foremost, and prepared him to be more helpful to his brethren. A good man's falls make him better when repented of and forgiven and remembered; and Satan's sifting does the opposite of the sifter's intention, and the same as the Master's winnowing.

It is the height of folly and rashness to neglect Christ's warnings; but Peter ventures it, so sure of himself is he. His readiness to follow to the death was sincere; but how little he knew, or we know, the power of unfelt temptation, or the weakness of untried faith! Trust no feelings or resolves. Despise no dangers, nor neglect any warnings, and rely on Christ alone. "Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe."

III. In the last section of the lesson the disciples are warned that a new order of things for them is at hand, requiring their own providence and effort, in new measure. The laws regulating their earlier mission are formally repealed, and, in the prospect of Christ's departure, they and all the succeeding ages of the Church are summoned to add to their faith the wise use of ordinary means of provision and defence. The time for going out without purse or scrip is over. To do so now is not faith, but disobedience. To provide purse and wallet is not "worldliness," but

obedience. A present Christ enjoins bare reliance on Him; a present-absent Christ enjoins reliance and effort.

Did He mean the injunction about the sword to be taken literally? If He did He contradicts all the rest of His teaching, and destroys the force of His own demonstration to Pilate that His kingdom was not of this world. If His utterances seem contradictory, is it more reasonable that the many should determine the meaning of the one, or the opposite? If He meant the disciples to take His words as they did take them, would He have said that "two swords" were "enough"? A hopeful armoury to fight the world with!

The precept but puts in parabolic form the thought that for the future His servants had to use their own arms to protect their own heads, since He would be no more with them; but that He who sent them forth as lambs in the midst of wolves, and taught that the weapon for His followers was the copy of His own all-suffering patience, departs from the whole tenor of His example and teaching here seems to me incredible.

Why is this new order of things to come to pass? Verse 37 answers, "For I say unto you," etc. If He is to be reckoned among the transgressors, His servants, too, will be the objects of the world's hostility and misconstruction. To expect the world to help the Church is to be blind to the relations between them, which copy those between the world and Christ. To take help from the world's scrip or wallet or sword, is to sin against the very spirit of the order which Christ has established. Mark, too, the recurrence here of that imperative "must" to which Jesus willingly bowed. It moulded His life; and He went to Calvary as obeying the necessity, which was created by redeeming love, and accepted unfalteringly, by His filial obedience and resolve to save.

LESSON XL.

Gethsemane.

St. Luke xxii. 39-53.

39. "And He came out, and went, as He was wont, to the mount of Olives; and His disciples also followed Him.

40. And when He was at the place, He said unto them, Pray that ye enter not into temptation.

41. And He was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed,

42. Saying, Father, if Thou be willing, remove this cup from Me: nevertheless not My will, but Thine, be done.

43. And there appeared an angel unto Him from heaven, strengthening Him.

44. And being in an agony He prayed more earnestly: and His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.

45. And when He rose up from prayer, and was come to His disciples, He found them sleeping for sorrow,

46. And said unto them, Why sleep ye? rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.

47. And while He yet spake, behold a multitude, and he that was called Judas, one of the twelve, went before them, and drew near unto Jesus to kiss Him.

48. But Jesus said unto him, Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?

49. When they which were about Him saw what would follow, they said unto Him, Lord, shall we smite with the sword?

50. And one of them smote the servant of the high priest, and cut off his right ear.

51. And Jesus answered and said, Suffer ye thus far. And He touched his ear, and healed him.

52. Then Jesus said unto the chief priests, and captains of the temple, and the elders, which were come to Him, Be ye come out, as against a thief, with swords and staves?

53. When I was daily with you in the temple, ye stretched forth no hands against Me: but this is your hour, and the power of darkness."

"PUT off thy shoes from off thy feet." Cold analysis is out of place here, where the deepest depth of a Saviour's sorrows is partly disclosed, and we see Him bowing

His head to the waves and billows that went over Him, for our sakes. Luke's account is much condensed, but contains some points peculiar to itself. It falls into two parts,—the solemn scene of the agony, and the circumstance of the arrest.

I. We look with reverent awe and thankfulness at that soul-subduing picture of the agonising and submissive Christ which Luke briefly draws. Think of the contrast between the joyous revelry of the festival-keeping city and the sadness of the little company which crossed the Kedron and passed beneath the shadow of the olive-trees into the moonlit garden. Jesus needed companions there; but He needed solitude still more. So He is "parted from them"; but Luke alone tells us how short the distance was,—"as it were a stone's throw," and near enough for the disciples to see and hear something before they slept.

That clinging to and separation from His humble friends gives a wonderful glimpse into Christ's desolation then. And how beautiful is His care for them, even at that supreme hour, which leads to the injunction twice spoken, at the beginning and end of His own prayers, that they should pray, not for Him, but for themselves. He never asks for men's prayers, but He does for their love. He thinks of His sufferings as temptation for the disciples, and for the moment forgets His own burden in pointing them the way to bear theirs. Did self-oblivious love ever shine more gloriously in the darkness of sorrow?

Luke omits the threefold withdrawal and return, but notes three things,—the prayer, the angel appearance, and the physical effects of the agony. The essentials are all preserved in his account. The prayer is truly "the Lord's prayer," and the perfect pattern for ours. Mark the grasp of God's Fatherhood, which is at once appeal and submission. So should all prayer begin, with the thought, at all events

whether with the word "Father" or no. Mark the desire that "this cup" should pass. The expression shows how vividly the impending sufferings were pictured before Christ's eye. The keenest pains of anticipation, which makes so large a part of so many sorrows, were felt by Him. He shrank from His sufferings. Did He therefore falter in His desire and resolve to endure the cross? A thousand times, no! His will never wavered, but maintained itself supreme over the natural recoil of His human nature from pain and death. If He had not felt the cross to be a dread, it had been no sacrifice. If He had allowed the dread to penetrate to His will, He had been no Saviour. But now He goes before us in the path which all have, in their degree, to travel, and accepts pain that He may do His work.

That acceptance of the Divine will is no mere "If it must be so, let it be so," much as that would have been. But He receives in His prayer the true answer,—that His will completely coincides with the Father's, and "Mine" is "Thine." Such conformity of our wills with God's is the highest blessing of prayer and the true deliverance. The cup accepted is sweet; and, though flesh may shrink, the inner self consents, and, in consenting to the pain, conquers it.

Luke alone tells of the ministering angel; and, according to some authorities, the forty-third and forty-fourth verses are spurious. But, accepting them as genuine, what does the angelic appearance teach us? It suggests pathetically the latter physical prostration of Jesus. Sensuous religion has dwelt on that offensively, but let us not rush to the opposite extreme and ignore it. It teaches us that the manhood of Jesus needed the communication of Divine help from without as truly as we do. The difficulty of harmonising that truth with His Divine nature was probably the reason for the omission of this verse in some manuscripts. It teaches the true answer to His prayer, as so often to ours; namely,

the strength to bear the load, not the removal of it. It is remarkable that the renewal of the solemn "agony" and the intenser earnestness of prayer follow the strengthening by the angel.

Increased strength increased the conflict of feeling, and the renewed and intensified conflict increased the earnestness of the prayer. The calmness won was again disturbed, and a new recourse to the source of it was needed. We stand reverently afar off, and ask, not too curiously, what it is that falls so heavily to the ground, and shines red and wet in the moonlight. But the question irresistibly rises, Why all this agony of apprehension? If Jesus Christ was but facing death as it presents itself to all men, His shrinking is far beneath the temper in which many a man has fronted the scaffold and the fire. We can scarcely save His character for admiration, unless we see in the agony of Gethsemane something much more than the shrinking from a violent death, and understand how there the Lord made to meet on Him the iniquity of us all. If the burden that crushed Him thus was but the common load laid on all men's shoulders, He shows unmanly terror. If it were the black mass of the world's sins, we can understand the agony, and rejoice to think that our sins were there.

II. The arrest. Three points are made prominent,—the betrayer's token, the disciples' resistance, the reproof of the foes; and in each the centre of interest is our Lord's words. The sudden bursting in of the multitude is graphically represented. The tumult broke the stillness of the garden, but it brought deeper peace to Christ's heart; for, while the anticipation agitated, the reality was met with calmness. Blessed they who can unmoved front evil, the foresight of which shook their souls! Only they who pray as Jesus did beneath the olives, can go out from their shadow, as He did, to meet the foe.

The first of the three incidents of the arrest brings into strong prominence Christ's meek patience, dignity, calmness, and effort, even at that supreme moment, to rouse dormant conscience, and save the traitor from himself. Judas probably had no intention of anything but showing the mob their prisoner by his kiss; but he must have been far gone in insensibility before he could fix on such a sign. It was the token of friendship and discipleship, and no doubt was customary among the disciples, though we never hear of any lips touching Jesus but the penitent woman's, which were laid on His feet, and the traitor's. The worst hypocrisy is that which is unconscious of its own baseness.

Every word of Christ's answer to the shameful kiss is a sharp spear, struck with a calm and not resentful hand right into the hardened conscience. There is wistful tenderness and a remembrance of former confidences in calling Him by name. The order of words in the original emphasises the kiss, as if Jesus had said, "Is that the sign you have chosen? Could nothing else serve you? Are you so dead to all feeling that you can kiss and betray?" The Son of man flashes on Judas, for the last time, the majesty and sacredness against which he was lifting his hand. "Betrayest thou," which comes last in the Greek, seeks to startle by putting into plain words the guilt, and so to rend the veil of sophistications in which the traitor was hiding his deed from himself. Thus to the end Christ seeks to keep him from ruin, and with meek patience resents not indignity, but with majestic calmness sets before the miserable man the hideousness of his act. The patient Christ is the same now as then, and meets all our treason with pleading, which would fain teach us how black it is, not because He is angry, but because He would win us to turn from it. Alas that so often His remonstrances fall on hearts as wedded to their sin as was Judas!

The rash resistance of the disciples is recorded chiefly for the sake of Christ's words and acts. The anonymous swordsman was Peter, and the anonymous victim was Malchus, as John tells us. No doubt he had brought one of the two swords from the upper room, and, in a sudden burst of anger and rashness, struck at the man nearest him, not considering the fatal consequences for them all that might follow. Peter could manage nets better than swords, and missed the head, in his flurry and in the darkness, only managing to shear off a poor slave's ear. When the Church takes sword in hand, it usually shows that it does not know how to wield it, and as often as not has struck the wrong man. Christ tells Peter and us, in His word here, what His servants' true weapons are, and rebukes all armed resistance of evil. "Suffer ye thus far" is a command to oppose violence only by meek endurance, which wins in the long run, as surely as the patient sunshine melts the thick ice, which is ice still, though pounded with a hammer.

If "thus far" as His own seizure and crucifying was to be "suffered," where can the breaking-point of patience and non-resistance be fixed? Surely every other instance of violence and wrong lies far on this side of that one. The prisoner heals the wound. Wonderful testimony that not inability to deliver Himself, but willingness to be taken, gave Him into the hands of His captors! Blessed proof that He lavishes benefits on His foes, and that His delight is to heal all wounds and stanch every bleeding heart!

The last incident here is Christ's piercing rebuke, addressed, not to the poor, ignorant tools, but to the prime movers of the conspiracy, who had come to gloat over its success. He asserts His own innocence, and hints at the preposterous inadequacy of "swords and staves" to take Him. He is no "robber," and their weapons are powerless, unless He wills. He recalls His uninterrupted teaching in

the temple, as if to convict them of cowardice, and perchance to bring to remembrance His words there. And then, with that same sublime and strange majesty of calm submission which marks all His last hours, he unveils to these furious persecutors the true character of their deed. The sufferings of Jesus were the meeting-point of three worlds,—earth, hell, and heaven. "This is your hour." But it was also Satan's hour, and it was Christ's "hour," and God's. Man's passions, inflamed from beneath, were used to work out God's purpose; and the Cross is at once the product of human unbelief, of devilish hate, and of Divine mercy. His sufferings were "the power of darkness."

Mark in that expression Christ's consciousness that He is the light, and enmity to Him darkness. Mark, too, His meek submission, as bowing His head to let the black flood flow over Him. Note that Christ brands enmity to Him as the high-water mark of sin, the crucial instance of man's darkness, the worst thing ever done. Mark the assurance that animated Him, that the eclipse was but for an "hour." The victory of the darkness was brief, and it led to the eternal triumph of the Light. By dying He is the death of death. This Jonah inflicts deadly wounds on the monster in whose maw he lay for three days. The power of darkness was shivered to atoms in the moment of its proudest triumph, like a wave which is beaten into spray as it rises in a towering crest and flings itself against the rock.

LESSON XLI.

In the High Priest's Palace.

St. Luke xxii. 54-71.

54. "Then took they Him, and led Him, and brought Him into the high priest's house. And Peter followed afar off.

55. And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them.

56. But a certain maid beheld him as he sat by the fire, and earnestly looked upon him, and said, This man was also with Him.

57. And he denied Him, saying, Woman, I know Him not.

58. And after a little while another saw him, and said, Thou art also of them. And Peter said, Man, I am not.

59. And about the space of one hour after another confidently affirmed, saying, Of a truth this fellow also was with Him: for he is a Galilæan.

60. And Peter said, Man, I know not what thou sayest. And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew.

61. And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny Me thrice.

62. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.

63. And the men that held Jesus mocked Him, and smote Him.

64. And when they had blindfolded Him, they struck Him on the face, and asked Him, saying, Prophesy, who is it that smote Thee?

65. And many other things blasphemously spake they against Him.

66. And as soon as it was day, the elders of the people and the chief priests and the scribes came together, and led Him into their council, saying,

67. Art Thou the Christ? tell us. And He said unto them, If I tell you, ye will not believe:

68. And if I also ask you, ye will not answer Me, nor let Me go.

69. Hereafter shall the Son of man sit on the right hand of the power of God.

70. Then said they all, Art Thou then the Son of God? And He said unto them, Ye say that I am.

71. And they said, What need we any further witness? for we ourselves have heard of His own mouth."

THE present lesson deals with three incidents, each of which may be regarded either as an element in our Lord's sufferings or as a revelation of man's sin. He is denied, mocked, and formally rejected and condemned. A trusted friend proves faithless, the underlings of the rulers brutally ridicule His prophetic claims, and their masters vote Him a blasphemer for asserting His divinity and Messiahship.

I. We have the failure of loyalty and love in Peter's denials. It is not my province to determine the relation of Luke's narrative here to that of the other evangelists; but I may observe that he puts all Peter's denials before the hearing by the council, from which it is clear that the latter was later than the hearing recorded by Matthew and John. The first denial probably took place in the great hall of the high-priest's official residence, at the upper end of which the prisoner was being examined, while the hangers-on huddled round the fire, idly waiting the event.

The morning air bit sharply, and Peter, exhausted, sleepy, sad, and shivering, was glad to creep near the blaze. Its glinting on his face betrayed him to a woman's sharp eye, and her gossiping tongue could not help blurting out her discovery. Curiosity, not malice, moved her; and there is no reason to suppose that any harm would have come to Peter, if he had said, as he should have done, "Yes, I am His disciple." The day for persecuting the servants was not yet come, but for the present it was Jesus only who was aimed at.

No doubt, cowardice had a share in the denials, but there was more than that in them. Peter was worn out with fatigue, excitement, and sorrow. His susceptible nature would be strongly affected by the trying scenes of the last day, and all the springs of life would be low. He was always easily influenced by surroundings, and just as,

at a later date, he was "carried away" by the presence at Antioch of the Judaisers, and turned his back on the liberal principles which he had professed, so now he could not resist the current of opinion, and dreaded being unlike even the pack of menials among whom he sat. He was ashamed of his Master and hid his colours, not so much for fear of bodily harm as of ridicule. Was there not a deeper depth still in his denials, even the beginnings of doubt whether, after all, Jesus was what he had thought Him? Christ prayed that Peter's "faith" should not "fail," or be totally eclipsed, and that may indicate that the assault was made on his "faith," and that it wavered, though it recovered steadfastness.

If he had been as sure of Christ's work and nature as when he made his great confession, he could not have denied Him. But the sight of Jesus bound, unresisting and evidently at the mercy of the rulers, might well make a firmer faith stagger. We have not to steel ourselves to bear bodily harm if we confess Christ; but many of us have to run counter to a strong current flowing round us, and to be alone in the midst of unsympathising companions ready to laugh and gibe; and some of us are tempted to waver in our convictions of Christ's divinity and redeeming power, because He still seems to stand at the bar of the wise men and leaders of opinion, and to be treated by them as a pretender. It is a wretched thing to be persecuted out of one's Christianity in the old-fashioned fire-and-sword style; but it is worse to be laughed out of it or to lose it, because we breathe an atmosphere of unbelief. Let the doctors at the top of the hall, and the lackeys round the fire who take their opinions from them, say what they like, but let them not make us ashamed of Jesus.

Peter slipped away to the gateway, and there, apparently, was again attacked, first by the portress and then by others,

which occasioned the second denial, while the third took place, in the same spot, about an hour afterwards. One sin makes many. The devil's hounds hunt in packs. Consistency requires the denier to stick to his lie. Once the tiniest wing tip is in the spider's web, the whole body will be wrapped round by its filthy, sticky threads before long.

If Peter had been less confident, he would have been more safe. If he had said less about going to prison and death, he would have had more reserve fidelity for the time of trial. What business had he thrusting himself into the palace? Over-reliance on self leads us to put ourselves in the way of temptations which it were wiser to avoid. Had he forgotten Christ's warnings? Apparently so. Christ predicts the fall that it may not happen, and if we listen to Him we shall not fall.

The moment of recovery seems to have been while our Lord was passing from the earlier to the later examination before the rulers. In the very flood-tide of Peter's oaths the shrill cock-crow is heard, and the half-finished denial sticks in his throat at the sound. At the same moment he sees Jesus led past him, and that look, so full of love, reproof, and pardon, brought him back to loyalty, and saved him from despair. The assurance of Christ's knowledge of our sins against Him melts the heart, when the assurance of His forgiveness and tender love comes with it. Then tears, which are wholly humble but not wholly grief, flow. They do not wash away the sin, but they come from the assurance that Christ's love, like a flood, has swept it away. They save from remorse, which has no healing in it.

II. We have the rude taunts of the servants. The mockery here comes from Jews, and is directed against Christ's prophetic character, while the later jeers of the

Roman soldiers made a jest of His kingship. Each set lays hold of what seems to it most ludicrous in His pretensions, and these servants ape their masters on the judgment seat in laughing to scorn this Galilean peasant who claimed to be the Teacher of them all. Rude natures have to take rude ways of expression, and the vulgar mockery meant precisely the same as more polite and covert scorn means from more polished people; namely, rooted disbelief in Him. These mockers were contented to take their opinions on trust from priests and rabbis. How often, since then, have Christ's servants been objects of popular odium at the suggestion of the same classes, and how often have the ignorant people been misled by their trust in their teachers to hate and persecute their true Master!

Jesus is silent under all the mockery, but then, as now, He knows who strikes Him. His eyes are open behind the bandage, and see the lifted hands and mocking lips. He will speak one day, and His speech will be detection and condemnation. Then He was silent, as patiently enduring shame and spitting for our sakes. Now He is silent, as long-suffering and wooing us to repentance; but He keeps count and record of men's revilings, and the day comes when He whose eyes are as a flame of fire will say to every foe, "I know thy works."

III. We have the formal rejection and condemnation by the council. The hearing recorded in verses 66 to 71 took place "as soon as it was day," and was apparently a more formal official ratification of the proceeding of the earlier examination described by Matthew and John. The ruler's question was put simply in order to obtain material for the condemnation already resolved on. Our Lord's answer falls into two parts, in the first of which He, in effect, declines to recognise the *bona fides* of His judges and the competency of the tribunal, and in the second goes

beyond their question, and claims participation in Divine glory and power. "If I tell you, ye will not believe." Therefore He will not tell them.

Jesus will not unfold His claims to those who only seek to hear them in order to reject, not to examine, them. Silence is His answer to ingrained prejudice masquerading as honest inquiry. It is ever so. There is small chance of truth at the goal if there be foregone conclusions or biassed questions at the starting-point. "If I ask you, ye will not answer." They had taken refuge in judicious but self-condemning silence when He had asked them the origin of John's mission, and the meaning of the one hundred and tenth Psalm, and thereby showed that they were not seeking light. Jesus will gladly speak with any who will be frank with Him, and let Him search their hearts; but He will not unfold His mission to such as will refuse to answer His questions. But, while thus He declines to submit Himself to that tribunal, and, in effect accuses them of obstinate blindness and a fixed conclusion to reject the claims which they were pretending to examine, He will not leave them without once more asserting an even higher dignity than that of Messiah. As a prisoner at their bar, He has nothing to say to them; but as their King and future Judge, He has something. They desire to find materials for sentence of death, and though He will not give these in the character of a criminal before His judges, He also desires that the sentence should pass, and He will declare His Divine prerogatives and full possession of Divine power in the hearing of the highest court of the nation.

It was fitting that the representatives of Israel, however prejudiced, should hear at that supreme moment the full assertion of full deity. It was fitting that Israel should condemn itself, by treating that claim as blasphemy. It

was fitting that Jesus should bring about His death by His twofold claim,—that made to the Sanhedrim, of being the Son of God, and that before Pilate, of being the King of the Jews.

The whole scene teaches us the voluntary character of Christ's death, which is the direct result of this tremendous assertion. It carries our thoughts forward to the time when the criminal of that morning shall be the Judge, and the judges and we shall stand at His bar. It raises the solemn question, Did Jesus claim truly when He claimed Divine power? If truly, do we worship Him? If falsely, what was He? It mirrors the principles on which He deals with men universally, answering "him that cometh, according to the multitude of his idols," and meeting hypocritical pretences of seeking the truth about Him with silence, but ever ready to open His heart and the witness to His claims to the honest and docile spirits who are ready to accept His words, and glad to open their inmost secrets to Him.

LESSON XLII.

"The Rulers take Counsel together."

ST. LUKE xxiii. 1-12.

1. "And the whole multitude of them arose, and led Him unto Pilate.

2. And they began to accuse Him, saying, We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar, saying that He Himself is Christ a King.

3. And Pilate asked Him, saying, Art thou the King of the Jews? And He answered him and said, Thou sayest it.

4. Then said Pilate to the chief priests and to the people, I find no fault in this man.

5. And they were the more fierce, saying, He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place.

6. When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked whether the man were a Galilæan.

7. And as soon as he knew that He belonged unto Herod's jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who himself also was at Jerusalem at that time.

8. And when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad: for he was desirous to see Him of a long season, because he had heard many things of Him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by Him.

9. Then he questioned with Him in many words; but He answered him nothing.

10. And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused Him.

11. And Herod with his men of war set Him at nought, and mocked Him, and arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe and sent Him again to Pilate.

12. And the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together: for before they were at enmity between themselves."

LUKE'S canvas is all but filled by the persecutors, and gives only glimpses of the silent Sufferer. But the silence of Jesus is eloquent, and the prominence of the accusers and judges heightens the impression of His passive

endurance. We have in this lesson the Jewish rulers with their murderous hate ; Pilate contemptuously indifferent, but perplexed and wishing to shirk responsibility ; and Herod with his frivolous curiosity. They present three types of unworthy relations to Jesus Christ.

I. We see first the haters of Jesus. So fierce is their hatred that they swallow the bitter pill of going to Pilate for the execution of their sentence. John tells us that they began by trying to get Pilate to decree the crucifixion without knowing Jesus' crime ; but that was too flagrant injustice, and too blind confidence in them, for Pilate to grant. So they have to manufacture a capital charge on the spot, and they are equal to the occasion. By the help of two lies, and one truth so twisted as to be a lie, they get up an indictment, which they think will be grave enough to compel the procurator to do as they wish.

Their accusation, if it had been ever so true, would have been ludicrous on their lips ; and we may be sure that, if it had been true, they would have been Jesus' partisans, not His denouncers. "The Gracchi complaining of sedition" are nothing to the Sanhedrim accusing a Jew of rebellion against Rome! Every man in that crowd was a rebel at heart, and would have liked nothing better than to see the standard of revolt lifted in a strong hand. Pilate was not so simple as to be taken in by such an accusation from such accusers, and it fails. They return to the charge, and the "more urgent" character of the second attempt is found in its statement of the widespread extent of Christ's teaching, but chiefly in the cunning introduction of Galilee, notoriously a disaffected and troublesome district.

What a hideous and tragic picture we have here of the ferocity of the hatred which turned the very fountains of justice and guardians of a nation into lying plotters against innocence, and sent these Jewish rulers cringing before

Pilate, pretending loyalty and acknowledging his authority! They were ready for any falsehood and any humiliation, if only they could get Jesus crucified. And what had excited their hatred? Chiefly His teachings, which brushed aside the rubbish both of ceremonial observance and of rabbinical casuistry, and placed religion in love to God and consequent love to man; then His attitude of opposition to them as an order; and finally His claim, which they never deigned to examine, to be the Son of God. That, they said, was blasphemy, as it was, unless it were true,—an alternative which they did not look at. So blinded may men be by prejudice, and so mastered by causeless hatred of Him who loves them all!

These Jewish rulers were men like ourselves. Instead of shuddering at their crime, as if it were something far outside of anything possible for us, we do better if we learn from it the terrible depths of hostility to Jesus, the tragic blindness to His character and love, and the degradation of submission to usurpers, which must accompany denial of His right to rule over us. "They hated Me without a cause," said Christ; but He pointed to that hatred as sure to be continued towards Him and His servants as long as "the world" continues the world.

II. We have Pilate, indifferent and perplexed. Luke's very brief account should be supplemented by John's, which shows us how important the conversation, so much abbreviated by Luke, was. Of course, Pilate knew the priests and rulers too well to believe for a moment that the reason they gave for bringing Jesus to him was the real one, and his taking Jesus apart to speak with Him shows a wish to get at the bottom of the case. So far, he was doing his duty, but then come the faults. These may easily be exaggerated, and we should remember that Pilate was the most ignorant, and therefore the least guilty, of all the persons mentioned

in this lesson. He had probably never heard the name of Jesus till that day, and saw nothing but an ordinary Jewish peasant, whom his countrymen, like the incomprehensible and troublesome people they were, wished, for some fantastic reason, to get killed.

But that dialogue with his Prisoner should have sunk deeper into his mind and heart. He was in long and close enough contact with Jesus to have seen glimpses of the light, which, if followed, would have led to clear recognition. His first sin was indifference, not unmingled with scorn, and it blinded him. Christ's lofty and wonderful explanation on the nature of His kingdom and His mission to bear witness to the truth fell on entirely preoccupied ears, which were quick enough to catch the faintest whispers of treason, but dull towards "truth." When Jesus tried to reach his conscience by telling him that every lover of truth would listen to His voice, he only answers by the question, to which he waited not for an answer, "What is truth?"

That was not the question of a theoretical sceptic, but simply of a man who prided himself on being "practical," and left all talk about such abstractions to dreamers. The limitations of the Roman intellect and its characteristic over-estimate of deeds and contempt for pure thought, as well as the spirit of the governor, who would let men think what they chose as long as they did not rebel, spoke in the question. Pilate is an instance of a man blinded to all lofty truth, and to the beauty and solemn significance of Christ's words, by his absorption in outward life. He thinks of Jesus as a harmless fanatic. Little did he know that the truth, which he thought moonshine, would shatter the empire, which he thought the one solid reality. So-called practical men commit the same mistake in every generation. "All flesh is as grass; . . . the Word of the Lord endureth for ever."

Further, Pilate sinned in prostituting his office by not setting free the Prisoner when he was convinced of His innocence. "I find no fault in this Man" should have been followed by immediate release. Every moment afterwards, in which He was kept captive, was the condemnation of the unjust judge. He was clearly anxious to keep his troublesome subjects in good humour, and thought that the judicial murder of one Jew was a small price to pay for popularity. Still, he would have been glad to have escaped from what his official training had taught him to recoil from, and what some faint impression, made by his patient Prisoner, gave him a strange dread of. So he grasps at the mention of Galilee, and tries to gain two good ends at once by handing Jesus over to Herod.

The relations between Antipas and him were necessarily delicate, like those between the English officials and the rajahs of native States in India; and there had been some friction, perhaps about "the Galileans, whose blood" he "had mingled with their sacrifices." If there had been difficulties in connection with such a question of jurisdiction, the despatch of Jesus to Herod would be a graceful way of making the *amende honorable*, and would also shift an unpleasant decision on to Herod's shoulders. Pilate would not be displeased to get rid of embarrassment, and to let Herod be the tool of the priests' hate.

How awful the thought is of the contrast between Pilate's conceptions of what he was doing and the reality! How blind to Christ's beauty it is possible to be, when engrossed with selfish aims and outward things! How near a soul may be to the light, and yet turn away from it and plunge into darkness! How patient that silent Prisoner, who lets Himself be bandied about from one tyrant to another, not because they had power, but because He loved the world, and would bear the sins of every one of us! How terrible

the change when these unjust judges and He will change places, and Pilate and Herod stand at His judgment-seat!

III. We have the wretched, frivolous Herod. This is the murderer of John Baptist,—"that fox," a debauchee, a coward, and as cruel as sensuous. He had all the vices of his worthless race, and none of the energy of its founder. He is by far the most contemptible of the figures in this lesson. Note his notion of, and his feeling to, Jesus. He thought of our Lord as of a magician or juggler, who might do some wonders to amuse the vacuous *ennui* of his sated nature. Time was when he had felt some twinge of conscience in listening to the Baptist, and had almost been lifted to nobleness by that strong arm. Time was, too, when he had trembled at hearing of Jesus, and taken Him for his victim risen from a bloody grave. But all that is past now. The sure way to stifle conscience is to neglect it. Do that long and resolutely enough and it will cease to utter unheeded warnings. There will be a silence which may look like peace, but is really death. Herod's gladness was more awful and really sad than Herod's fear. Better to tremble at God's Word than to treat it as an occasion for mirth. He who hates a prophet because he knows him to be a prophet, and himself to be a sinner, is not so hopeless as he who only expects to get sport out of the messenger of God.

Then note the Lord's silence. Herod plies Jesus with a battery of questions, and gets no answer. If there had been a grain of earnestness in them all Christ would have spoken. He never is silent to a true seeker after truth. But it is fitting that frivolous curiosity should be unanswered, and there is small likelihood of truth being found at the goal when there is nothing more noble than the temper at the starting-point. Christ's silence is the penalty of previous neglect of Christ's and His forerunner's words.

Jesus guides His conduct by His own precept, "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs"; and He knows, as we never can, who come into that terrible list of men to whom it would only add condemnation to speak of even His love. The eager hatred of the priests followed Jesus to Herod's palace, but no judicial action is recorded as taking place there. Their fierce earnestness of hate seems out of place in the frivolous atmosphere. The mockery, in which Herod is not too dignified to join with his soldiers, is more in keeping. But how ghastly it sounds to us, knowing whom they ignorantly mocked! Cruelty, inane laughter, hideous pleasure in an innocent man's pain, disregard of law and justice,—all these they were guilty of; and Herod, at any rate, knew enough of Jesus to give a yet darker colouring to his share in the coarse jest.

But how the loud laugh would have fallen silent if some flash had told who Jesus was! Is there any of our mirth, perhaps at some of His servants, or at some phrase of His gospel, which would in like manner stick in our throats if His judgment throne blazed above us? Ridicule is a dangerous weapon. It does more harm to those who use it than to those against whom it is directed. Herod thought it an exquisite jest to dress up his prisoner as a king; but Herod has found out, by this time, whether he or the Nazarene was the sham monarch, and who is the real one. Christ was as silent under mockery as to His questioner. He bears all, and He takes account of all. He bears it because He is the world's Sacrifice and Saviour. He takes account of it, and will one day recompense it, because He is the world's King, and will be its Judge. Where shall we stand then,—among the silenced mockers, or among the happy trusters in His Passion, and subjects of His dominion?

LESSON XLIII.

The Innocent Criminal and the Unjust Judge.

St. Luke xxiii. 13-25.

13. "And Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people,

14. Said unto them, Ye have brought this Man unto me, as one that perverteth the people: and, behold, I, having examined Him before you, have found no fault in this Man touching those things whereof ye accuse Him:

15. No, nor yet Herod: for I sent you to him; and, lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto Him.

16. I will therefore chastise Him, and release Him.

17. (For of necessity he must release one unto them at the feast.)

18. And they cried out all at once, saying, Away with this Man, and release unto us Barabbas:

19. (Who for a certain sedition made in the city, and for murder, was cast into prison.)

20. Pilate therefore, willing to release Jesus, spake again to them.

21. But they cried, saying, Crucify Him, crucify Him.

22. And he said unto them the third time, Why, what evil hath He done? I have found no cause of death in Him: I will therefore chastise Him, and let Him go.

23. And they were instant with loud voices, requiring that He might be crucified. And the voices of them and of the chief priests prevailed.

24. And Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required.

25. And he released unto them him that for sedition and murder was cast into prison, whom they had desired; but he delivered Jesus to their will."

THIS lesson falls into three stages, each marked by a speech of Pilate's. First, there is his attempt to liberate his Captive, and the rulers' refusal of his proposal (vers. 13-19); second, his renewed vain effort and its failure (vers. 20-23); and, third, his shameful surrender. The

prominence given by Luke to the other actors in the great tragedy, rather than to the Sufferer, is even more remarkable in this than in the last lesson. He even omits the fact of the scourging, which he must have known, so desirous is he to fix our attention on the crimes of Pilate and the Jews. The former is a murderer out of weakness, the latter are moved by ferocious hatred.

I. Note the feeble attempt to do justice, overborne by the determined animosity of the Jews. We do not know whether Pilate was a weak-willed man or not; but certainly he shows the symptoms of being so, though it must be allowed that his position required much circumspection, and a judicious mixture of concession and firmness in managing his unruly government. His judgment-seat was planted above a powder magazine, and any spark might cause an explosion. He had to coerce, and yet not to go far enough to provoke an appeal to Rome,—the one thing of which a Roman governor lived in dread.

One can see that he is afraid of his subjects, and takes his revenge for being obliged to consult their wishes by gibes and sneers, and by an occasional assumption of authority, which does not hide the fact that he becomes their tool. His speech (vers. 14-16) begins with a tone of judicial authority and observance of legal forms, but its end contradicts its beginning; and the formal tone of the judge scarcely masks the fact of his surrender. What a halting "therefore" that is in verse 16! The only worthy conclusion from the premises would have been, "I will therefore set Him free; for your accusation is transparently false."

Pilate had no right to send Jesus to Herod, if convinced of His innocence; and now that his attempt to get rid of the whole troublesome case by that side wind has failed, he has still less colour of justice in proposing to scourge Him.

His grave statement of the course of proceeding only makes his final capitulation a more glaring fault. His offer to scourge was meant to compromise by inflicting the punishment which preceded crucifixion, in the hope that it might satisfy the Jews; and he seems to have had the custom of releasing one prisoner at the feast in view, in adding the suggestion of releasing Jesus after scourging. But to propose a compromise was to surrender all. If Pilate was willing to palter with his high trust so far as to scourge an innocent man to please that howling mob, they had only to howl a little more and louder to get him to kill, to please them. One stone dislodged from a wall makes a place for the pickaxe, which will bring it all down.

The plain lesson is that, in matters of right and wrong, no hair's-breadth of concession should ever be made, and none can be made without giving up all. In this world, full of urgent voices calling on us to do wrong, our only safety is in absolute refusal. If we give an inch, we shall have to give an ell. It is easier to say "No" out and out, than to begin with a little "Yes," in hope of thereby being allowed to say "No" afterwards.

Men who know their own mind, even when it is a base mind, generally get their own way. So the fierce cries of the crowd finish one of Pilate's feeble compromises. Barabbas is a travesty of Jesus in his very name, which means Son of the Father, and he was what the rulers had falsely denounced Jesus as being, a rebel. Their choice of him proves how little horror and how much sympathy they had for resistance to Rome, and so convicts them of falsehood, and throws lurid light on their preferences and hatreds. If Barabbas embodied the national aspirations, Jesus must be unwelcome. What we love, that we are. A liberated Barabbas could only mean a crucified Jesus. The whole tragedy of the nation is condensed into that one act, which

stands as a symbol, and indeed as one instance, of the perverted choice and hideous blindness which were their ruin. A like mistaken choice is made by many of us, and it brings like results. "Ye killed the Prince of Life"—mysterious and paradoxical as the possibility of such a contradiction sounds, awful as the reality of such a crime is—"and desired a murderer to be granted unto you,"—and therein they wrote their own sentence and slew themselves. So do we when we choose any person or thing as our trust and king, and depose Jesus from His throne.

II. Pilate's renewed attempt and its failure (vers. 20-23). The liberation of Barabbas would be a formal act, occupying some time, and we must suppose that it followed on verse 19. The governor probably hoped that his concession would put the crowd in a good humour, but it only taught them their power. He has nothing more to say than at first, and had already made the fatal mistake of arguing and negotiating with his subjects, so that it was too late to assume the tone of authority. "I command, you obey," would have done at first, but not now. He has trailed his authority in the mud, and given the rulers an advantage which they use remorselessly.

What a position for the representative of the emperor to be vainly trying to make terms with a riotous assemblage, and to be shouted down by them! He seems to have felt the indignity; for there is a touch of impatience in his remonstrance, feeble and ineffectual as it is. One gleam of honest indignation, and one attempt still to play the righteous judge, are there. "What evil hath this Man done?" Pilate asks for facts on which to base his sentence, and gets only the yell of hatred. "I will therefore chastise Him and release Him." Again the expedient of weakness tainted with injustice. Why could he not do what he said, instead of asking their leave to do it? Because he was more con-

cerned about their good opinion of him than about such a trifle as scourging or crucifying one uninfluential Jew, and more afraid of losing office than of doing wrong. Have there ever been any politicians or officials since who have succumbed to the same temptation?

This section of Luke's narrative condenses rigorously, and leaves out much which we get from John. He does not tell us what was the last shot fired by the rulers, which made Pilate surrender at once. They threatened him with an information laid against him at Rome, to the effect that he sheltered traitors. He knew enough of the jealous tyrant to whom he was responsible to know that such a charge would peril position, and life itself; and self-interest carried the day. Justice, dignity, the strange awe which had begun to creep over him, are all swept out of sight.

There is something tragic in his ignominious submission, even apart from the thought of Christ. He stands as a terrible example of the wickedness which may come from weakness, and of the danger of trifling in the smallest degree with the strict lines of duty. But when we think of what it really was which he did, and how ignorant he was of it, the tragedy darkens, and we have to leave to wiser decision than ours the questions of his guilt and place.

III. The end of our narrative gives the victory of hate and Pilate's shameful surrender. Probably the striking incident of Pilate's washing his hands comes in here. It was a vain disavowal of responsibility. His hands were none the cleaner, though the resolute hatred of the rulers was ready to take all the burden on themselves. We do not get rid of our complicity in evil by saying, "I could not help it. The blame lies at my instigators' door." At theirs and at ours,—at theirs for impelling, at ours for being impelled.

Luke crystallises his condemnation of both parties into two

clauses, the one of which sets in the clearest light the sin of the rulers and people, and the other that of Pilate. They asked for him that "for insurrection and murder had been cast into prison." Such a choice convicted the choosers of aversion from all the beauty and sweetness of Christ's character, and of incapacity to see these because they did not love them, and mirrored their own aspirations as reflected in their favourite. To reject Jesus, and that in favour of Barabbas, was to prove their own sinfulness. If to receive a prophet in the name of a prophet argues some sympathy with the prophet's character, though there be no share in the prophet's gifts, to choose Barabbas because he was a murderer and a rebel revealed the direction of their sympathies and their real characters. The judgment which men form of Jesus is the touchstone of their inmost selves. By their attitude to Him "the thoughts of many hearts are revealed," and the destinies of men shall righteously be adjudged. We choose no more wisely or worthily than did these Jews when we take others for our trust. We cannot reject Jesus without choosing some substitute as unworthy as Barabbas

"Pilate gave sentence that what they asked for should be done. . . . Jesus he delivered up to their will." The judge condemns himself who surrenders the innocent to clamour, and the ruler is proved unworthy who is ruled by his subjects' mere will. No baseness can be baser than such prostitution of authority and perversion of justice. Pilate's sin is summed in these two sentences. It was a cowardly surrender of the sword of justice to the hands of a bloodthirsty mob, by which he became a hired assassin. The motive for his yielding is not distinctly stated, but it is clearly simple seeking of his own advantage. At first state policy, which has spread its mantle over so many crimes, might have influenced Pilate; but, long before the

end, it was naked selfishness which did so, and the last fragment of hesitation was swept away when he was threatened with a complaint to the emperor. So mean a motive adds blackness to his deed.

The analysis of Pilate's conduct points the solemn lesson that, since we know so little of what may be the issues of our acts, we should give the more earnest heed to keep their motives pure, lest, like this man, we should do worse things than we know. Pilate thought that he was simply securing his position by a little stretch of indulgence, involving nothing more serious than the unnoticed death of one more insignificant Jew. He was damning his name to everlasting infamy, and slaying the Prince of life. If once we let selfish considerations shape our conduct, we may "crucify" the Lord "afresh," and, like Pilate, wash our hands, and say, "I have done no harm."

LESSON XLIV.

The Tree of Life.

St. Luke xxiii. 33-47.

33. "And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left.

34. Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted His raiment, and cast lots.

35. And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided Him, saying, He saved others; let Him save Himself, if He be Christ, the chosen of God.

36. And the soldiers also mocked Him, coming to Him, and offering Him vinegar,

37. And saying, If Thou be the King of the Jews, save Thyself.

38. And a superscription also was written over Him in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

39. And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on Him, saying, If Thou be Christ, save Thyself and us.

40. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation?

41. And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss.

42. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom.

43. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with Me in paradise.

44. And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour.

45. And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst.

46. And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, He said, Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit: and having said thus, He gave up the ghost.

47. Now when the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man."

THERE is something very impressive in the unbroken continuity of the clauses in this lesson, which follow one another linked by a simple "and." Like the waves of

the Dead Sea, they roll heavily in dreary succession. "All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me." We lose the impression of protracted and multiplied sorrows by attempting any division into sections; and it is better simply to follow the course of the narrative, as it unfolds the long series of a Saviour's pains for us, even while recognising that the three precious sayings, which Luke alone preserves, stand out from the sullen ocean like tall cliffs, not without a light on their heads.

The account of the act of fastening to the cross has nothing to say about physical sufferings, and passes by all the details of these with a reverent reticence which it were well to have always observed. The fact is stated with as little obtrusion of the writer's feelings as if it were a trivial one. How unlike legend, or myth, or anything but sober narrative, in which the narrator is hidden by his theme! Surely the tone of the gospel accounts of the crucifixion bears truth stamped upon them, if ever writings did.

Who are the agents intended by the vague "they"? Pilate had delivered Jesus to the rulers, and probably they are meant, in accordance with Peter's charge (Acts ii. 23, 36). At all events, they had the arrangement of carrying out the sentence; and the ignominy designed by crucifying the two robbers at the same time was the product of their malevolent ingenuity. They meant to point Him out as the worst of the three; but their coarse mockery, as so often, carried out Divine purposes, and occasioned a blessed manifestation of His redeeming power. "He was numbered with the transgressors," and the outward fulfilment of that prophecy, on the cross between the two malefactors, was but as a symbol of its real fulfilment in that death, which delivered the penitent and numbered him among the saints.

The first of the seven words from the cross, which, in

accordance with the tone of his Gospel, Luke alone records, was spoken at the moment when keenest suffering was being inflicted. No cry of pain, no groan, broke from Christ's lips. While the nails pierced His flesh His answer to His torturers was His prayer for them. It is the voice of infinite pity and love, the echoes of which have sounded on many a scaffold and from many a fire, and the power of which has cast out the wild spirit of revenge. The dying Stephen prayed to the living Christ the prayer which he had learned from the dying Christ, and multitudes since have breathed it.

But Jesus' prayer addresses the Father in that consciousness of Sonship peculiar to Himself, and on the cross repeats the claim which had brought Him thither. It intercedes with authority, and is the beginning of His priestly office, even before the sacrifice on which it rests is complete. It determines the criminality of men as only He who knows all hearts can do. It implies the truth that ignorance diminishes sin, but that it does not annihilate sin; for, if there were no sin, there needed no pardon,—and if there had been no ignorance in that awful crime, pardon had been impossible. The greater or less criminality of the ignorance is not in question. All sin has this element. If men knew how much blessedness they lose, and how much misery they incur, by their sin, surely they would not sin. But ignorance may be culpable, because voluntary, and arising from loving darkness.

Christ's prayer procured pardon, but personal faith was needed to possess the pardon procured. Some of that crowd were, no doubt, converted at Pentecost; some may have been crushed by the Roman catapults at the siege.

The slow punishment of crucifixion gave opportunity for ghastly selfishness to carry on trivial occupations while the victim's life was ebbing. So Luke shows us three pictures

of the unfeeling onlookers. First, the crowd gaping as at any spectacle, with only morbid curiosity titillated in addition. Second, virulent hatred, not content with working His death, but trying to add other pains to bodily ones. But mockery of Jesus turns unwittingly and unwillingly to His praise, and in the act of denying His Messiahship and Divinity is constrained to acknowledge His beneficence, unselfishness, and miracles. The temptation in the wilderness is repeated in another form in these taunts. How little the mockers knew that He could have saved Himself and come down from the cross, and that He did not just because He would "save others." For ever is it true that he who would save others cannot save himself. But it is true in an altogether special sense here.

The rough soldiers' mockery has not the same vitriol of malice as the rulers' has, but is rather simple brutality, without any hatred. A crucified Jew who had called himself a king of these despised people was all the better subject for practical jests, because any flung at him would glance off to hit them too, and because Pilate had set the example in his scoffing superscription. So the soldiers take their cue from it. They do not know what the rulers mean by talking about a "Christ of God." That is not a matter interesting them, but they understand the comedy of "this"—this poor crucified Sufferer—being dubbed by the Roman authority the "king," and they bring the cup of "vinegar" in derision. Such a king deserves, as they think, such cup-bearers.

The title on the cross is connected here with the soldiers jest. It, too, had a double aim,—to ridicule the Jews as well as their "King." Title and jest were true. The cross is Christ's throne of power; and ever since His servants have gazed on it with thankful wonder that "this"—the meek Sufferer and Sin-Bearer dying there for the

world—"is the King." Not from the "mouths of babes and sucklings" only, but from those of the "enemies and avengers" themselves, does God "perfect praise."

The bystanders pass from sight, and we come nearer to the crosses where the three wait death's slow approach. Scoffs from lips white with death are hideous, revealing a spirit unawed into reverence and wholesome dread by the near and awful future, and untouched by that sense of common misery which would have kept the mocker silent. But the taunt of the one thief draws out the confession of the other. He knew enough of Jesus to know that He was innocent. But many a man in the crowd knew that. This man knew that he deserved his own cross, and shudderingly looked on to a more terrible tribunal. It was the consciousness of sin which bore him on the wonderful swiftness and strength of faith, manifest in his ever-memorable prayer. Christ's prayer for His murderers may have wrought the thief's hope in Jesus. But it was a noble faith which believed in the kingdom at such an hour. Disciples had fled, their faith eclipsed. The only living soul that believed in Jesus then was this man, on the edge of another world.

In spite of all his own sin and Christ's apparent defeat, he was so sure of His coming somehow in glory and power, that he thinks all will be well with himself, if the King will only remember the hour when they hung side by side on Calvary. That is the cry which, in life and in death, the sight of Christ's innocence and cross, and the consciousness of our own guilt, should draw forth. Mark, in the second word from the cross, kingly authority asserted to the end. Note, also, the immediate entrance to Paradise as contrasted with the vague, "When Thou comest." They who die in the faith die into bliss immediate, and there dwell till that future coming, when they wait on and follow the appearing King. The locality "in Paradise" is named

after the far more important thing "with Me." That is enough. The presence of Jesus is the heaven of heaven, whatever and wherever the ultimate abode of the blessed may be, after Christ's second coming; and it is the joy of Paradise, wherever and whatever that may be. It seems precarious to build large eschatological inferences on this enigmatical saying; and surely a better use of the royal word of the King who opens Paradise is to grasp the all-blessed truth that, wherever He is, there His servants die to be, and that with no gulf of insensibility or gap in time.

A third word, that to Mary and John, seems to belong to the first period on the cross, before the sixth hour, and these three end His utterances to others. Then came that awful three hours of darkness, when He hung dying in the dark, and silent but for the cry of desertion and agony that broke from His desolate soul at the close of these hours. Commentators talk about the sympathy of nature, and so on. Nature is utterly heartless and cruelly unsympathising, but God darkened the light. That symbolised the gross darkness covering the people, as well as, possibly, the sinfulness of the tragedy regarded as man's act. But in its higher aspect Christ's death was not eclipse, but illumination. "The darkness is past, and the true light now shineth," and the eclipse was over before He breathed out His spirit. The rent veil is especially significant to Luke, who delights in the universal aspect of the Gospel. It showed that the ancient holy place was no longer shut off and denied to men. The destruction of the old order was, no doubt, expressed by it; but the more blessed thought of the new access by Jesus for all men alike is the great truth intended.

In the last word from the cross, we may note the voice of the Son, "Father." The consciousness of His filial relationship is clear at last. It contrasts with the mysterious

sense of desertion in the dread cry that preceded. The sacrifice is accepted; and the horror of spiritual death, which is separation, is overcome before the advent of physical death. He can calmly submit to the shadow, having borne and conquered the substance. The strong cry is the voice of perfect trust and obedience. The words come from a non-Messianic psalm, where they express the submission and trust of a soul for all life's changes. Jesus takes them for His own in witness of His true manhood and participation in our death, and as pattern of how He would have us live and die. That clear consciousness of falling into the gracious hands, stretched out to catch the child as he falls, may be ours. Only we have to commit our souls to Him, as He committed His to God.

Stephen cried, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" It is the voice of the Lord of life and death. "I commit" is more than a mental act of trust. It is a definite expression of his voluntary death, which is confirmed by the remarkable unanimity of the language of the evangelists, who all use expressions which imply that our Lord's death was His own act. In this supreme sense, He "gave Himself for us," and "offered Himself without spot to God."

The centurion's confession testifies to the impression, on a rude nature, of the unspeakable pathos and elevation of the death. But if all that we have to say, as we gaze on Calvary, is, "This was a righteous man," it becomes the saddest and dreariest scene in the world's history, raising, in its acutest form, the old mystery of the sorrows of virtue as stumbling-blocks for faith in God's goodness or power. But if we see there the God-given sacrifice for the world's sin, our hearts melt with thankfulness, and we can take as ours the grand proclamation, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself."

LESSON XLV.

Sunrise.

St. Luke xxiv. 1-12.

1. "Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them.

2. And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre.

3. And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus.

4. And it came to pass, as they were much perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments;

5. And as they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead?

6. He is not here, but is risen: remember how He spake unto you when He was yet in Galilee,

7. Saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.

8. And they remembered His words,

9. And returned from the sepulchre, and told all these things unto the eleven, and to all the rest.

10. It was Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women that were with them, which told these things unto the apostles.

11. And their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not.

12. Then arose Peter, and ran unto the sepulchre; and stooping down, he beheld the linen clothes laid by themselves, and departed, wondering in himself at that which was come to pass."

NO eye saw Jesus coming forth from the grave. If the narratives of the Gospels had not been simple records of facts, could they have resisted the temptation of painting the act of resurrection? Surely their silence looks liker history than legend. Luke's narrative diverges very widely from the others, and has three well-marked characteristics,

—its exclusive reference to the appearances of Jesus in Jerusalem, its emphasis on the depression and disbelief of the disciples, and its culmination in their appointment as witnesses, by which the "former treatise" in good Theophilus' hands is linked on to its sequel in the so-called Acts of the Apostles. Our present lesson has four steps.

I. The Empty Tomb.—The resurrection appears to have taken place in the first moments of the first day of the week. All the evangelists place the women's visit at an early hour, variously described by them as "as it began to dawn," or "very early, . . . when the sun was risen." But ere the glimmering light showed them the path to the tomb He had come forth, anticipating the dawn. Love and sorrow woke the women early, but the sleeping Conqueror was awake before them.

Mary Magdalene was the leader of the little group, as one delivered from so awful a fate could not but be; and with her the other ministering women who had waited on Jesus living, and now came, brave, and finding some solace in the act, to lavish useless gifts on the sacred form already swathed, by Nicodemus' loving care, in linen cloths, fragrant with "a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred-pound weight." They had seen it so buried, and yet they brought their spices; for they wished to have some share in these sad offices, and did not stay to ask if their gifts were needful. The gifts meant endless love, and yearning to help, and undying constancy, and these were more fragrant than spices.

The motive of our offerings is of more importance than their use. The great circular stone, like a millstone set on edge and working in a groove, was rolled away. It had been a hindrance in their thoughts; but many an obstacle in the path of loving service to Jesus that looms large in imagination is gone when we reach the place of service.

Why was it rolled away? Not that Jesus might come forth, —for He needed no angel hands to remove obstacles to His rising, and the resurrection preceded the angel's coming,— but it was put aside that disciples might enter to see the empty place, and that angels might join in their adoration. The veil of the temple was rent when He died. The great stone on the grave was rolled away when He rose. Men may enter the holy place because He has died. They come forth from the tomb because He has risen.

The sight of the empty grave was no joy to the weeping eyes that first saw it in the twilight; but the twilight has broadened into day, and that open sepulchre with the sunshine flooding it, and angels sitting to guard the very ground where the body of Jesus had lain, is the seal of Christ's finished and accepted work, and the firm foundation of the living hope of life hereafter.

II. The Angel Message.—We need not wonder at the diversity in the evangelists as to the number of the angels and the words of their communication. We know too little about the laws of such appearances to be able to say that it is impossible that their numbers should have appeared to vary according to the eyes that looked; and the plain common-sense remark that if there were two, there was certainly one, disposes of the "contradiction" found in the accounts. It was as fitting that there should be "a multitude of the heavenly host" at the grave as at the birth; and they may have appeared and disappeared as suddenly as a flight of white-winged birds wheeling in the sky, with the sunshine glancing on them as they turn. But their presence there is the main thing, as indicating Christ's lordship over them too, and their "desire to look into" that strange cavern where their and our Lord had lain, wrapped in the death that was foreign to them. They were there as His attendants, and as "your servants for Jesus' sake."

The gradual preparation of the overstrained hearts of the disciples, especially of these loving, sad women, for the disclosure of the mighty fact, is very beautiful and tender. Sudden joy may harm. So Christ will not appear, without sending messengers to prepare His way before Him, and lets the blessedness trickle in drops, rather than burst in a flood. He will not show Himself at once; but first the empty grave, and then the angel's message, shall gently make minds and hearts ready for the full wonder and joy. The evangelists diverge markedly in their report of the angels' words. Why should we suppose that to be contradiction? Surely it is more likely that much passed in that marvellous conversation, when immortal tongues spoke the speech of earth, to tell of the victory over death, for which there were no terms in the speech of heaven, than that it was limited to such few words as any one of the reporters gives us.

The much decried expedient of the harmonisers, that of supposing that all the reports are mutually supplementary, seems in this case most natural. All [the Synoptists] preserve the one central statement: "He is not here; He is risen." For the rest, they sum up differently what was said. Luke sets the central announcement in the centre, leads up to it by a question, and follows it by recalling half-forgotten and wholly misunderstood predictions, uttered in the sweet old days to which the women's hearts turned so regretfully. The question not only had its original force in raising dim thoughts of the impossibility of the grave being the fit place for Him who is life, but it carries for us the large truths of His essential nature as the living One, and, by emphasising the incongruity of His subjection to death, points the lesson of the reason for His dying. To suppose that He should be holden of it is impossible if we know who He is. To know that He has let it hold Him

for a time, is to understand that His death was for our life, and is the death of death.

The great announcement is in very few and curiously simple words. "Not here,"—as they could see, if they looked closely into the dark cave. "Risen,"—as they could not see, and were too stunned at first either to believe or disbelieve. That one word, if we hold it fast, changes all things, conquers death, dries tears, calms grief, widens our outlook, and makes earth the nursery and heaven home. The fact which it proclaims ratifies Christ's loftiest claims, declares God's acceptance of His sacrifice, is the pattern and the power of immortal life for us, if we trust to the sacrifice of His death, and share in the spirit of His risen life.

The words He had spoken needed experience to interpret them, as so many of His words do. We have to grow up to them; and, till we do, they lie comparatively neglected, but then they flash into new meaning, and we remember that He told us so, and wonder that we ever forgot or misunderstood. We are told that the disciples' forgetfulness of Christ's predictions of His resurrection is "unpsychological,"—which is a learned way of saying that it is a much more stupid thing than the critic thinks he would have done,—and probably all the while the said critic has many a truth lying "bedridden in the dormitory of his soul," waiting for events to bring them to consciousness.

III. The Disbelieved Report.—Luke has nothing to say about our Lord's appearance to the women on their way back. Probably he did not know of it; but inferring ignorance from silence is precarious. The point which he wishes to make emphatic is the reception of the tidings by "the eleven" and "all the rest." He uses very strong language. "Idle talk" was what the men who, for the rest of their lives, were to repeat the same called it when

they first heard it. Flat disbelief, and that declared in rude terms, which must have stabbed the women like a knife, was the attitude of all. The value of that fact has often been pointed out, but should never be overlooked. It disposes of all the talk about the resurrection as being hallucination, born of excited expectations.

The very opposite of such excitement was the true condition. All hope was shattered. They were crushed by disappointment, and ready to scatter. The Shepherd was smitten, and what else could the sheep do? Resurrection was the very last thing that they dreamed of. Just because they did not believe, we may the more surely believe. Their testimony is enhanced by their initial incredulity; and in particular the modern hypotheses, which try to save them from the stigma of fraud, and yet to refuse them the credit of veracity, by supposing hallucination, which requires a heated atmosphere of expectation for its growth, are blown to atoms by the fact that the first tidings of the resurrection seemed to the future witnesses of the resurrection "as idle talk," to be promptly disbelieved.

IV. Peter's Race to the Tomb.—What winged the denier's feet? Probably that infinitely gracious message which had come to him, "Go, tell His disciples and Peter." Then his foul cowardice had not alienated his Master. How he must have writhed with the thought that his last look from Jesus had been that one of sad, reproachful disappointment, which He had cast on the poor coward as He passed, fettered, to Pilate's palace! And now all was over, and he could never tell his Lord how he loved Him still! "You cannot mend it now" is the sharpest pang that tears us when we think of flaws in our conduct to the dear ones gone. Hope came into the gloom, and that, joined to his natural impetuosity, sent Peter as fast as he could go to the sepulchre. His eyes

saw no angels. He needed to be left alone a little longer with only the bare facts, which he could see; and then, when he had wondered long enough, Jesus Himself came to him in that interview, the fact of which was known to many, but the details of which were buried in Peter's breast. He saw the empty place, and the clothes lying there, in token that calm deliberation had marked the resurrection, and that the vesture of the grave was fit for Jesus no more.

One might have thought that Peter would have been only too eager to believe, and that the suspense of judgment and the slow pondering of wonder ascribed to him are not like his rapid movement of mind and feeling. But he was weighted with a great sin, and that makes a heavy heart slow to embrace hope. His companion, of whom Luke tells nothing, was first to reach the grave,—for love outran sorrow,—but Peter was first to enter; for his nature was less open to such finer emotions as held back reverent love. But John was the first to believe; for the heart that had drunk most deeply of love, and had no stain of treachery, was most swift to receive the full joy that came from the risen Lord. John walks in the sunshine of belief, while his friend gropes in the twilight of "wonder." So love to Jesus, though it be the child of faith, becomes the ally and helper of its parent; and, while the first message of the gospel is "believe and love," the subsequent exhortation is also "love and believe."

LESSON XLVI.

The two Travellers and their Companion.

St. Luke xxiv. 13-27.

13. "And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about threescore furlongs.

14. And they talked together of all these things which had happened.

15. And it came to pass, that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus Himself drew near, and went with them.

16. But their eyes were holden that they should not know Him.

17. And He said unto them, What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad?

18. And the one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answering, said unto Him, Art Thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days?

19. And He said unto them, What things? And they said unto Him, Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people:

20. And how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and have crucified Him.

21. But we trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, to-day is the third day since these things were done.

22. Yea, and certain women also of our company made us astonished, which were early at the sepulchre;

23. And when they found not His body, they came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that He was alive.

24. And certain of them which were with us went to the sepulchre, and found it even so as the women had said: but Him they saw not.

25. Then He said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken:

26. Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory?

27. And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself."

WHO were these two disciples? A very old guess is that the unnamed one was Luke himself; but the first words of the Gospel seem to show that he was not an

"eye-witness," and the tempting supposition must fall to the ground. Neither of the two was an apostle (ver. 33). They were quite insignificant persons, and the fact that they were is part of the preciousness of the incident. The risen Christ spent the greater part of that first day with these two, listening to their despondency and enlightening their darkness. Strange employment for Him, and a prophecy of His permanent action!

I. We have the two travellers and the Stranger who joins them. The fact that these two had left the company of the disciples, for Emmaus, where possibly one of them had his home (ver. 29), looks as if they intended to desert. They had come away without waiting for the solution of the strange reports which had reached them. We do not know that they intended to go back to Jerusalem. Cleopas' later explanation breathes utter despondency, from the conviction that all is over and their hopes blasted. Their eager talk was about the rumours of the resurrection as well as the crucifixion, and apparently the two did not entirely agree in their views, as may be inferred from their "questioning together," and "exchanging words with one another." If they had stayed with their brethren and waited patiently, taking the twilight granted till the full dawn came, they would have had all their doubts solved in due time. We often give ourselves a great deal of trouble, and lose much peace, by worrying over questions which can only be solved by time, and will be so if we have patience.

Why did Jesus select these two for recipients of His teaching? The answer is connected with that to another question,—Why did He not make Himself known at once, but, as it were, mask His identity? Probably the reply to both questions is to be found in considering the purpose of all the appearances of our Lord after His resurrection. These were not only for the sake of giving conclusive

evidence of the fact to which the disciples were to be witnesses, but also for the purpose of preparing them for the coming period, when He would be wholly absent in bodily reality. They were a bridge between the old days of bodily presence, and unrestrained, constant communication, and the coming ones of bodily absence and communication by faith only. Gently and gradually their hearts' tendrils were unwound from the "Christ after the flesh," and trained to climb to the unseen Lover and Friend. It was the apprenticeship of faith,—the encouragement of the young wings to fly. So here Jesus comes to these two because they needed Him so much, and in all their despondency yet loved Him and made Him their theme. But He comes veiled, because in their love they doubted, and in order that they might be led up to the higher ground of believing.

Their non-recognition is traced by Luke to an incapacity in them, while Mark rather lays stress on a change in our Lord's "form" as the cause. The simple conclusion is that both operated, and were both intended to leave room for the better discernment which His burning words produced, as He led them to "believe all that the prophets have spoken." That faith being effected, the sight followed. The world says, "seeing is believing," but the converse is truer,—believing is seeing. First faith, then sight, is the law for the future, on the verge of which they stood, and for which that walk to Emmaus prepared them, as the lessons it teaches may prepare us.

The threefold value of this incident is evidential, preparatory, and symbolical. The value as a proof of the resurrection needs few words. Unless the narrative is a (which nobody ventures to affirm now), it finishes the modern expedient of getting rid of the witnesses to the resurrection by jingling with "hallucinations." A halluci-

nation which lasted through a long day and hours of talk, is rather too strong a draft on our credulity.

The symbolical value of the incident should not be overlooked, though it should always be strictly subordinated. It is real, just because, as has been said above, all the events of the forty days were preparatory for the permanent conditions of the Christian life. Wherever two walk together, and have Christ for their theme and in their hearts, He will walk between them. No road is so common, no duty so homely, but that His presence is ours. Especially is He near troubled hearts. We should think it great condescension and sad waste of time to go seven miles out of our way, and spend a long spring day in cheering two poor, ignorant men. But Jesus, with the mystery of the grave still hanging about Him, and the glory of the risen life beginning to invest Him, willingly did it. Let us take the comfort, and see that we follow the example.

II. We have the sad outpouring of hearts unlocked by sympathy. Jesus asks questions, not because He does not know, but that we may enjoy the blessedness of telling Him all that is in our hearts. His reasons for hiding His identity have been already considered, and we need only remark further as to His questions, that they may fairly be taken as not so much symbols as instances of His loving readiness to receive and sympathise with the outpourings of our hearts, whatever trouble may agitate them. The Revised Version's rendering in verse 18, "And they stood still, looking sad," is picturesque, and shows us the two men arrested by the question, and at first too much affected by it to answer.

The touch of another hand, however gentle, often at first makes grief more; but to tell a trouble, though it needs an effort, brings ease. Sorrow is apt to think that its cloud wraps everybody, and so Cleopas wonders that there was

one man in Jerusalem ignorant of what had happened. All subjects but one seem to him impossible, and he forgets that the Stranger might know of the crucifixion, and yet not know that they were speaking about it. Christ's further brief question, of one word in the Greek, is like the turning of the small handle which opens a sluice. Out pours a stream. Both speak at once now. Their speech is an artless revelation of themselves. Note their yet surviving faith. Their Master is still to them a prophet, a miracle-worker, a teacher, approved of God, and manifested to the nation.

Note how incautiously they arraign the rulers to a stranger, how they lay all the guilt at their door, and have not a word to say about Pilate, and how they seem to regard their questioner as a Gentile, from their expression "our rulers." Note, further, the wailing despair, and wistful looking after the hopes which had melted like a mist wreath, in that "trusted." That dream, they imply, is past now. And all the while the hope which they thought buried in their Master's grave had risen with Him, and was ready to flood their hearts in new and nobler form. Note their strange reference to the third day. Does it imply that hope is dead now that so long time has passed? or are there some ashes of flickering hope yet glowing in them, and some remembrance of His sayings about the third day? It is hard to tell, but sorrow is often inconsistent, and in the fluctuations of their souls they may have caught a moment's sight of the light, as they rose to the top of a wave, though they soon lost it again.

Their references to the stories from the sepulchre do not sound as if they had hope. The one thing which they think certain is the disappearance of the body. As for the rest, there is a touch of unbelief in their way of putting the women's testimony, "They came, saying, . . . angels, which

said"; so that it is only a report of a report which we have to go on. Note, too, that they do not give the angels' "saying" as being that He was "risen," but that He was "alive," which may, in their minds, have cast doubt on the death rather than proclaimed a resurrection. Their allusion to Peter and John's visit shows that Luke must have known that the latter accompanied the former, and thus warns us not to infer ignorance from silence.

One plain conclusion from all that these two say to the Stranger is that they should not have been on their way to Emmaus. There was enough to make them wait for the confirmation or contradiction of the reports; and if their hearts had not been clouded by doubt, which had all but thickened to conclusive disbelief, they could not have withdrawn from their "company" while such a question remained unsettled. Their artless disclosure of their state of mind suggests the question, Was such hopeless despondency likely to give birth to the story of a resurrection if it had not happened? What set light to the smoke and turned it into glowing flame? How came these faint-hearted doubters to be transformed into men "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name"? The only answer is,—the resurrection and its sequel wrought the change. That all this fluid doubt and despondency should have been consolidated into heroic faith, unfaltering in the face of suffering and death, demanded the pressure of that mighty fact, without which the future of the Church and the transformation of the disciples is impossible.

III. We have the teachings of the Stranger. Our Lord steadily pursued His design of evoking faith first, and, only second, granting sight. The shortest road is not always the best. So He does not yet do what would have settled all their doubts, nor discuss the truth of the reports which

they quote, but lifts the whole conversation to a higher level. His rebuke touches both their intellect and their will or affections. The ground of unbelief extends to both. The moral nature has much influence over the intellectual, and belief or unbelief is not the act of bare intelligence. The rebuke sets the prophetic word on a pinnacle, and implies that true wisdom consists in believing it. The necessity for the Christ to suffer is not here the deep necessities in God's government or in man's sin, but the necessity arising from prophecy, which must be fulfilled. "O excellent expositor! Christ commenting on His own prophecies, all of which He first inspired, afterwards fulfilled, and now interpreted." How fain we would have known what were the prophecies to which He pointed! But this, at all events, is clear, that He saw the ancient scriptures to be full of Himself, and has taught us that He is the goal-aim of all the earlier revelation.

In these days when the battle is being waged round the Old Testament, it is well to approach it with the conviction which actuated Jesus when He interpreted it, that its meaning is all wrapped in Him, and that whatever other qualifications we may bring to its study, we shall not understand its organic unity, its unfolding fulness, nor its informing purpose, unless we come to it believing that "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

LESSON XLVII.

Emmaus and Jerusalem.

St. Luke xxiv. 28-43.

28. "And they drew nigh unto the village, whither they went: and He made as though He would have gone further.

29. But they constrained Him, saying, Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. And He went in to tarry with them.

30. And it came to pass, as He sat at meat with them, He took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them.

31. And their eyes were opened, and they knew Him; and He vanished out of their sight.

32. And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while He talked with us by the way, and while He opened to us the scriptures?

33. And they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them.

34. Saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon.

35. And they told what things were done in the way, and how He was known of them in breaking of bread.

36. And as they thus spake, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.

37. But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit.

38. And He said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts?

39. Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself: handle Me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see Me have.

40. And when He had thus spoken, He showed them His hands and His feet.

41. And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, He said unto them, Have ye here any meat?

42. And they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish, and an honeycomb.[1]

43. And He took it, and did eat before them."

LUKE makes the appearance of Jesus to the assembled apostles the climax to which the other appearances lead up. There are, then, three steps in this lesson,—the

[1] The words "and of an honeycomb" are omitted in the Revised Version.

transitory manifestation at Emmaus, the expectant gathering in Jerusalem, and the present Christ graciously permitting sensible demonstration of His resurrection.

I. The momentary manifestation in the quiet chamber at Emmaus. The right point of view for understanding it is to consider it as a revelation to sense, following and rewarding renewed and deepened faith. The two were not made believers in the resurrection because they saw Him, but they saw Him because they believed in His resurrection. Already the law, which was to determine the apprehension of His presence for the future, began to work. If we know who Christ is, and what He has done, we shall not need arguments to prove that the resurrection is a well-attested historical fact. These are precious in their place; but the living comprehension of His work certifies the fact to the believer on other grounds. It behoved the Christ to suffer and to rise.

How simple and natural the story is! Of course, a chance companion on the road parts from travellers at their door, unless they ask him in, and, equally of course, kindliness suggests the offer of hospitality, especially if night draws on. Both Jesus and the two do just as ordinary travelling companions would have done. But the simple naturalness of the incident does not exclude its deeper meaning. Jesus will "go further," if we do not keep Him with us. He makes as if He would, that we may urge Him to stay. He forces Himself on no man and He desires to tarry with us, but cannot fulfil His desire unless we invite Him. As on the Galilean lake, and as to the blind men and Canaanitish woman, so is He to these disciples and to us, apparently addressing Himself to go away, only that He may evoke our entreaties that He would abide. How wonderful that He who uses no violence to us lets us use a kind of force with Him, and suffers our wishes

to "constrain" His feet! The seven miles must have been slowly traversed, if the day, which was so young when they set out, was far spent before they arrived. Many a pause must have been on the road, as He opened the Scriptures. It is not tedious to travel slowly if Jesus is teaching us.

Probably the house at Emmaus belonged to one of the two. That home is hallowed into which Jesus is invited and comes with the master of it. He who goes with us on the dusty, weary way will abide with us in the hours of rest. Christ sanctifies domestic repose, and will sit at our tables, if we will. Luxury and levity and excess banish Him. How many so-called Christians are there who would find His presence at their meals very inconvenient!

Where Jesus is invited as guest, He becomes host. He took the place of master of the house, according to His own deep saying, "I . . . will sup with him, and he with Me." He takes the humble fare, blesses it, and gives it back to the owner, sweetened by His hand. His blessing mends the feast and makes the coarsest food a dainty. There is no need to thrust in a reference to the Lord's Supper here. Jesus was simply taking the place of the householder. But we may suppose that the familiar action, which the two had often seen, helped to open their eyes, as seems implied in their subsequent statement, that He was made known to them "in breaking of bread." That, however, may only mark the time, not the means of recognition, which, in any case, was due to Christ's will, and, as the whole story shows, was the consequence, not the reason for faith. His words when unknown rekindled the dying flame, and then the blessed momentary recognition perfected faith and sealed it with experience. So it is always.

He vanished as soon as seen,—partly because the purpose of appearing had been accomplished, and partly because the disciples now needed to be taught to bear His absence

more than to enjoy His bodily presence. Hence, during all the forty days they had but occasional sight of Him whom they were thereby being trained to trust without seeing.

Very noteworthy is it that what they said, when they found themselves alone, expressed neither wonder at His resurrection nor sorrow at His withdrawal, but recalled the glow of belief and hope which had filled their hearts as He opened the Scriptures. The new understanding of these, or, in other words, a faith which grasped the resurrection as a predicted and necessary fact, was uppermost in their thoughts.

II. The final step before the great climax is that scene in the room at Jerusalem. The two travellers leave the unfinished meal and dare the dangers of the darkness, from which they had sought to shield their guest, because they have tidings which are "as a fire in their bones," and they cannot "stay." How different their communications by the way, under the bright light of the paschal moon, from those of the morning! The true possession of the good news of Christ will always impel to its impartation to others. A silent Christian is an anomaly. If we know nothing of such an impulse, we had better examine ourselves whether we are yet in the faith.

"The eleven" were gathered together,—where was the twelfth? Sleeping in a suicide's grave in the potter's field. A dead Christ had been the signal for dispersion. Nothing but the news of a living one could have arrested and reversed the process. The strange tidings had somehow been passed from mouth to mouth through the city, and a ring of eager and diversely minded lovers of Jesus surrounded the eleven, some fully believing, and some afraid to cherish the astounding hope. We can fancy the hum of voices into which the travellers came, and how their eagerness to speak was overborne by that of the crowd. The

very language of the announcement seems to witness to the presence of doubt, with which the speakers wrestle in that "indeed." What had convinced them? Only the appearance to Peter is mentioned,—that gracious and secret interview, too sacred for its details to be spoken, in which the denier poured out his penitence, and the Lord poured on him the effacing flood of His pardoning love. It is singular that no allusion was made to the appearance to the women and Mary. Was their testimony regarded as less important than Peter's, because he was an apostle, and they were only women? The new comers found space at last to tell their tale; and so, from one side to the other, the glad news is reverberated, like the antiphonies of some great chorus. Luke says nothing of the disbelief which, according to Mark, met their story. But it is clear, from the subsequent verses (vers 38-41), that there were incredulity and doubt among the multitude; and who can wonder if, in such an hour of agitation and mental bewilderment, contending thoughts chased each other across their minds as swiftly as clouds fly before a gale? They had not had time to settle down into a steadfast posture of fixed belief. Only prosaic critics, who have never known the tumult of conflicting feelings on some sudden burst of unexpected news, too good to be true, can take offence at the diverse representations of the evangelists. The piece of shot silk changes its hue from sombre to golden with a turn of the holder's wrist or the beholder's eye.

III. The solemn and blessed climax is the personal appearance of the Lord. Luke does not tell us of the closed doors, but his account is awe-inspiring in its very reticence. There He stood, coming, no man knew how or whence, where, a moment before, there had been nothing; "in the midst of them," as not having advanced thither, but being found there. It is His right place, the centre of the

circle, however far its circumference may sweep to-day. He is there still, though unseen, even as He must have been there before the gazers saw, or He could not have first been seen as standing there. How calm the salutation from His lips! It is the common greeting of every-day meeting. He comes back from the grave as if from an ordinary absence, and calms their hearts by the wish which on His lips is a gift. We wish each other peace; He gives it. What could more gently knit the past to the future, and assure the disciples that He was unchanged, than that familiar greeting? Jesus pours meaning into common words when He uses them.

It is not strange that the faith in His resurrection, which had begun in His absence, should have tottered for a moment at the first shock of that which was its strongest proof. Rather it is a touch of truth, strongly attesting the simple veracity of the whole narrative, that when He, whom they believed to have risen, stood before them, the first effect was not joy, but alarm. Either the imaginer of this scene was a consummate dramatist, or the teller of it is an accurate recorder of fact.

That terror is the occasion of the demonstration most convincing to the senses of any recorded. The whole of the last part of our lesson is occupied with our Lord's gracious condescension to hearts in which faith struggled with fear and doubt. It should not have been necessary, and, in so far as it was, His preparation by the previous appearances had failed of its intended effect; but not because of the disciples' unbelief does He turn from them. Rather, He lets their need, wrong as it was, shape His dealings, and gives the demonstration which He had wished to make unnecessary. Therein does He act in accordance with His continual method, stooping to the level of our weakness and sinful slowness, and giving us the aids to

faith, which it were better that we had outgrown. His gift takes the mould of the receiving vessel.

There are three points in this evidence for sense. The print of the nails proves His identity; the touch by the disciples, and His eating "before them," proves His corporeality. The risen Christ bears the marks of the nails, and the glorified Christ has perhaps not lost them; for the Lamb before the throne is "as it had been slain." But be that as it may, these evidences, if accepted, are conclusive, and if not accepted, can only be accounted for on the supposition of wilful lying somewhere.

Do these facts, that the risen body of Jesus bore the wounds of crucifixion, and was nourished by food, support the usual theory that it was in process of change into a glorified body? I venture to think not. They most naturally square with the other view that Jesus rose with the body in which He died, and bore it unchanged as long as He remained here, assuming that glorified corporeal manhood which He now wears only when the cloud hid Him from the long gaze of love. The facts which are relied on to establish the former view can all be explained on the supposition of His exercise of miraculous power over the "body of His humiliation," and most of them can be paralleled with events in His previous life, such as His walking on the water, and passing through the midst of the crowd, who sought to slay Him.

LESSON XLVIII.

The Church Below, the Lord Above.

St. Luke xxiv. 44-53.

44. "And He said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning Me.

45. Then opened He their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures,

46. And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day:

47. And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

48. And ye are witnesses of these things.

49. And, behold, I send the promise of My Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.

50. And He led them out as far as to Bethany, and He lifted up His hands, and blessed them.

51. And it came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into heaven.

52. And they worshipped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy:

53. And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen."

A HASTY reading might leave the impression that verses 44 to 49 continue the conversation on the evening of the resurrection, and that the ascension took place immediately thereafter. But Acts 1 shows that Luke knew that "forty days" elapsed before the end came, and, in the light of that chapter, the most reasonable view of these closing verses of the Gospel is that they are a summary of all our Lord's instructions during that time,

which is intentionally brief, as the writer had already in view his second "treatise."

The Gospel reaches its climax in the resurrection. The space between it and the ascension, as well as the ascension itself, are but the results of the resurrection manifested in act, and as a kind of border-land between the two halves of our Lord's activity are even more properly narrated as the foundation of "all that Jesus" continued "to do and teach" since then, than as the crown of His earthly ministry.

I. Luke, then, sums up in broad general outline the teachings of the forty days (vers. 44-49). The summary contains the heads of all which the Church is to continue till the end,—to believe, proclaim, be, and rely on.

First was taught Christ's relation to the Old Testament. He recalled his former declarations, which had sounded so enigmatical then and were so sun-clear now. There is a touch of pathos in the designation of that earlier intercourse as "while I was yet with you," and also the clear announcement that a new kind of intercourse has begun. Christ's teaching before Calvary was necessarily limited by the fact that it was before and not after. There could be no full explanation nor understanding of the meaning of the cross, before the cross, and yet there are the germs of the most articulate teaching of His atoning sacrifice and resurrection in His own earlier words.

But the first disciples needed, as we need, the light of the events to illuminate these. We must read all the Gospel by the sunlight of dawn of the first day of the week. The teaching here summarised bore both upon His dignity and office as the Christ and the Fulfiller of the Old Testament revelation, and on the inmost purpose and contents of that revelation as in all its parts pointing onward to Him. Law, Prophets, and Psalms make up the whole

Hebrew Scriptures, according to the division at present adopted, and apparently in use in Luke's time. So Jesus saw Himself in all the sundry times and divers manners of the older word of God. The fact of prediction of Him as Messiah, and of His death and resurrection as being the very heart of the Old Testament, is attested by His own authority, which cannot be waived aside as of no moment in the controversies now raging as to these books.

Nor can we understand the deep significance of the Old Testament by dint of learning only. Jesus must open our minds that we may understand the scriptures, and He will do it if we have faith in Him risen and instructing His people. There must be a moral and spiritual preparation, or men, however scholarly, will make wild work of the Old as of the New Testament.

Second comes instruction in the universal blessings flowing from His death and resurrection. This too is represented as part of the burden of prophecy, and many a triumphant glance which many a prophet directed far afield among the nations whom he saw flocking to do homage to the King in Zion, attests the truth of the representation. These are the instructions which in the Acts are described as "concerning the kingdom." If any gross idea of outward dominion, secured by the sword, lingered in the disciples' minds, this teaching would end them, unfolding, as it did, the sublime prospect of a universal monarchy, of which the instrument was the proclamation of the cross and resurrection, and the blessings repentance and the remission of sin. The weapon seems feeble; but it is mighty because it is "in His name," based on His revealed character and nature, wielded by His authority, and in dependence on His might, and, in a very real sense, as representing Himself.

The historical course of the kingdom, "beginning at

Jerusalem," the true means of its diffusion, the true source of their power, the blessings which it brings, and its ultimate universal sweep, are all given here, for the wonder and encouragement of that handful of men who were then its only subjects, and for the encouragement and stimulating of us, who have seen so much of the programme fulfilled in nineteen centuries that we may well be sure of its perfect accomplishment.

Next comes the personal duty of the disciples. "Ye"—poor, few, weak, half-bewildered, ignorant as you are—"are witnesses of these things." For the first disciples that was true in a way that it cannot be for us. And it is significant of much that the office was declared by Jesus to be that of witnesses; for "witness" implies fact. Not theories nor principles, not speculations nor dogmas, still less imaginations and fancies, had they to speak. Their task was to say, "We knew Him living, we mourned Him dead, we saw Him risen." The principles and doctrines involved in the fact would be evolved in due time; but the first business was to assert the fact. The gospel is, first and foremost, a veracious record of things that actually happened, and is established, not by argument, but by testimony.

Then, each generation of Christians has the same office and responsibility, though the object of the testimony varies. We cannot say we have seen, but we can say we have felt. Every man who has himself tasted that the Lord is gracious, is able, and therefore bound, to proclaim Him to others, and the most efficient means for most Christians is the simple testimony from experience to the reality of the blessings which Christ brings. Anybody who has "found the Messiah" can say so; and since he can, he ought. The Church, in all its members, is Christ's witness.

Next comes the gift of the needful qualifications. "The

promise of My Father" is that Holy Spirit which is the best of all the Father's promised gifts, of which He had spoken so abundantly in the last discourses in the upper room, and which, according to John, He had breathed upon them when He rose. The possession of that gift is our fitness for the office of witnessing.

But the disciples were bidden to "sit still" in Jerusalem, and wait something more than even that initial gift of the Spirit had brought. Time spent in believing expectance and desire is not wasted. There must be many an hour of "sitting still" if there is to be powerful witnessing. The only power for us is from above. It must clothe us, covering our native weakness and concealing self from others and from ourselves. Here, then, are the declarations of the source of all our power as witnesses for Christ, the conditions of receiving it,—even waiting, which is not idle, but believingly expects,—and the manner of bestowment, even clothing us therewith.

II. The Departure.—The day of ascension was probably just six weeks after that on the evening of which the Last Supper had been celebrated. Remembrances of their walk into Jerusalem then would recur to some of the company now as they retraversed the well-known road. It is not likely that the spot where Christ's feet last touched earth was on the conspicuous summit of Olivet, but rather somewhere on the eastern side of the hill, nearer Bethany, where, perhaps in some fold of the hill, seclusion could be secured. Did the disciples know, like Elisha, that "the Lord would take away their Master from their head that day"? At all events He knew, and the knowledge would breathe peculiar tenderness and urgency over His unrecorded words. "He lifted up His hands and blessed them." Like the high priest when he had finished his service, he lifted up his hands over the congregation to give

the blessing. The hands which had been pierced with nails, the arms which had been stretched out on the cross, were spread above the bowed heads of the little group, and dropped gifts which fulfilled His benediction. His whole work is summed up and His whole heart revealed in that last attitude and act.

Sweet and ever to be remembered are the last looks of our dear ones. Jesus would have this remembrance of Him stamped deepest on all our hearts. His blessing has power, and is a "deed of gift." Not these few early lovers of His, but all to the end of the ages share in it; and, like the thousands whom He fed, company after company is satisfied with its sweetness and fed from its fulness, and no less remains for the last than was more than enough for the first.

The reticent words of Luke yet make a clear picture possible. In the act of blessing our Lord withdrew a step or two, and then, possibly with arms still lifted in benediction, "was carried up into heaven." The word employed implies a slow, continuous motion, which we cannot but contrast with the whirlwind which swept Elijah to heaven. The mortal needed to be lifted by an external and forcible agency from his native earth, and rode "upon the wings of the wind," in a chariot of fire. But Jesus was going to His own calm home, and needed no aid to raise Him thither, whence it had needed the strong compulsion of His infinite love to bring Him down. His natural motion, if we may so speak, is upwards, and nothing but the cords of love and unaccomplished self-surrender kept Him here. These being cut, how should He not "ascend up where He was before"?

The ascension is the completion of the resurrection. It corresponds to the supernatural birth, and the evangelist whose record of the nativity is the fullest is also he who

principally tells us of the humanity, which had been born in Bethlehem, being taken up to the throne of God. The ascension witnesses to the completeness of His sacrifice, to its acceptance by the Father, to the presence within the veil of our all-powerful Intercessor, to the elevation to supreme authority of the Man who is our Brother. The eternal Word ascended where He had been from before the beginning, but the manhood is new to the throne of the universe. Where He is, there shall also His servants be; and as He is, so shall they too become. Even now we may, in a very real sense, live with Christ in heavenly places; and if we believe that He has gone up on high, we too shall "set our affections" and thoughts "on things above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God." For where our "treasure" is there should, and shall, our "hearts" be also.

The disciples showed us how we should think of the ascension when they worshipped Him, thus declared Him to be the Son of God, and then turned all the more joyfully to their homely tasks, and drowned the pain of parting in the flood of joy which poured over their spirits. They made all life worship, every place a temple, and every act and word adoration. Thus joyfully, and with unceasing thankfulness and praise, making music in life and lip, should those pass the brief hours of earthly sojourning, whose lives are hid with Christ in God. Where He is, is their home. It becomes them to live here as pilgrims and sojourners.

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